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ARGOSY

STORIES BY

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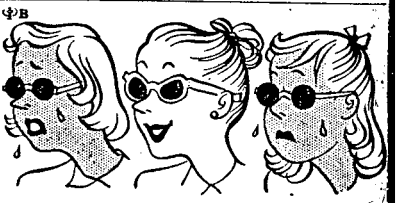

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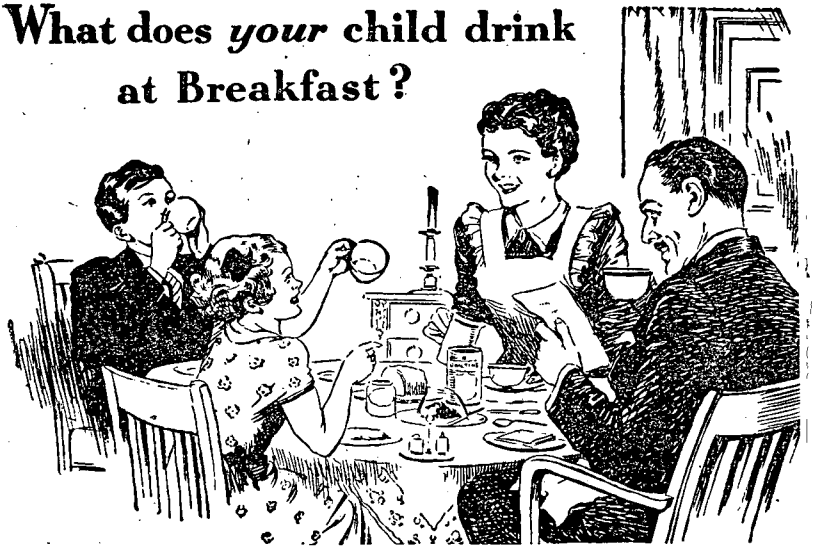

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ARGOSY

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Before Harvest

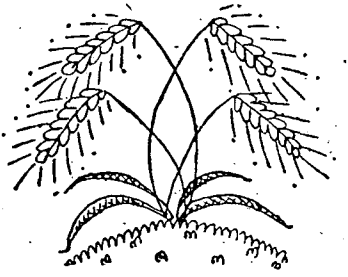
SWEETLY sang those bright plumed birds the flowers
To the half-ripe corn in the fields :
Why do you disguise yourself, drinker of darkness ?
Put on your golden robes.

(Beautiful was the song of those bright feathered ones
In the ruddy twilight of the cornfield.)

Now has the shining water of heaven descended,
And bright-eyed Drought has rasped on his belly.
The cypress tree has become a jewelled feather.
There came little snakes of water, wriggling in the dust,
Then pools bright as peacock-eyes.

Beautiful was the song of those bright feathered ones.
But the corn cried, uncertain :
I have come to the place where the roads meet.
Where shall I go ? Which way shall I now take ?
It may be that I shall go hence and perish.
My heart is all green jade :
When shall I see gold ?

RICHARD HUGHES
from the Aztec



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LAUGHING ODYSSEY

"Look, Amanda," I said, "I don't think you ought to have this chap to stay"

by DAVID WALKER

HARRY AMBLEY is my name. The horn tooted again imperiously outside. I disliked people hooting at my door; but this was Amanda.

I got in beside her. Amanda was displeased. "Can't you ever be in time?" she said as she put the shooting brake into gear. "Can't you ever by any chance? You keep me waiting ten minutes when I have all the shopping to do, and my new suit to try on, and lobsters to pick up, and go to the bank, and be at Hermione's by twelve, and it's after eleven already." She spoke very rapidly. "Well?"

"Sorry," I said humbly. "I didn't know you were in such a hurry. It *is* a vacation, after all."

"All life is a vacation for you."

I resented that, sighed, and said nothing. Amanda was always finding fault with me.

We turned into Main Street. It was a warm morning. White yachts and boats rode at their moorings. There was nothing to distinguish this from other fine days in our town. Tourists hovered round shop windows. The antique shops were busy. Pretty girls were two a penny, lacking glamour in abbreviated sun-suits. A few summer residents gossiped in the street. Fishermen were coming back from the weirs. A crowded jalopy rattled away from the local. It was the usual mixed atmosphere of unhurried work and time to be filled in; of the richly respectable and the hand-to-mouth. Tradesmen were selling things by an untiring discussion of the weather, and by other indirect methods of salesmanship. It was restful.

"There's Hermione," I said. She was entering Harper's grocery in a longness of legs and dachshunds.

Amanda said nothing. We drew up at Smith's hardware store. That was the very moment when a strange chain of events began. As she opened the car door, a man's voice sounded along the street. It grew louder, echoing between houses. It was a powerful voice, seeming to come from Slim Johnson's van.

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"What on earth?" said Amanda. But we could distinguish words now as the van drew nearer.

"I am Gabriel Gunn," the voice boomed. "Professor Gabriel Gunn. It is a pride and pleasure to be here in Rockhaven among you fine people. I have a question to ask. Do you find happiness in your daily lives, or are you restless, often discontented? I shall hope to meet you outside the Post Office in five minutes."

The van came past us. Standing in the back was a remarkable figure. He was hatless, clad from shoulder to knee in a sleeveless tunic, tied at the waist. It was made of white towel-material with a scarlet hem or beading. On the left breast was a great cornucopia—the mythical horn of plenty—and this was golden; from the cup projected fruits and cereals. His bare legs and arms were stalwart. He was deeply bronzed. He had a mane of jet-black hair; the shape of his head was craggy and noble. He neither smiled, nor looked to right or left.

"I am Gabriel Gunn," he began again. "Professor Gabriel Gunn . . ." The van moved on. But the impact of that strange figure!

I laughed and said: "It's a long time since I've seen one of those."

"One of those?" Amanda's hand was still on the door; she stared after the van.

"Hot gospel or a herbal remedy. But why on earth would he choose this of all places?"

"Why not?"

"Well, most people here seem reasonably happy, restful and contented, in so far as it's possible in this mad age. Besides, too much happiness is unhealthy, like too much intellect or too much wealth or too much . . ."

"You're always being cynical in that cheap way," interrupted Amanda coldly. She had got out of the car. "Four minutes. There's just time."

"What about the lobsters, the bank, the tailor . . .?" But she had disappeared into Smith's.

Roughly three minutes later we parked the shooting brake and joined the throng of people who were making hot-foot for the Post Office. In our town, closing the shops is only a matter of asking the customers to come back later. Any unusual event may cause this to happen; but I had never seen so many people. It seemed that everyone shared Amanda's interest. Poor restless Amanda seeking rest.

I spied Napoleon Tantivy and Heatherwell Rankin—the financier and the famous editor. They emerged from Robbin's

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drugstore, where they were wont to pass a part of each morning in the back room. Hazen Starsen, the weir fisherman was there—still in his thigh boots with the tops turned down—a big loose-limbed fellow; today there were flaky scales on both his cheeks—he must have taken herring. Why would Hazen bother about happiness? Bella Carver was there with her current young man, Jim Lake. They looked charming, standing hand in hand. Bella was much the prettiest girl in town; not so beautiful as Amanda; not soignée, elegant and daring like Hermione; but young and kind. She was the wharfinger's daughter. And there were many others—notably that same jalopy-load of clam diggers and beer bottles, parked close to the van where Professor Gunn stood with folded arms in the sunlight.

What could have brought all these people? I suppose it was a mild interest in a startling man, or the expectation of a laugh—the same reasons that had brought me. But Amanda's interest was more than mild; she thrust her way to the front of the crowd; I followed. Of course, she was the real reason why I had come.

Gabriel Gunn raised his right hand. A hush fell, except over the jalopy. "My friends," he said. It was an interesting voice, apart from the resonance and timbre. I could not tell then, and I never have found out—although my ear is sensitive in this regard—whether he spoke like an Englishman who had lived long in North America, or like an American who had lived long in England. No matter. "My friends. If you imagine that I have come as a hot gospeller, or that I have come to sell an infallible herbal remedy, you are far mistaken . . ."

Amanda gave me a hard nudge and a hostile glance. I had a queer premonition at this man's use of the very words that I had used. She stared again at him. It was difficult to tell his age—perhaps forty.

"I have come with no light and facile solution to the world's ills. A few minutes ago I asked a question; it is too soon to request your answer. First I must . . ."

"Here's an answer for you," said a thick loud voice from the near seat of the jalopy. "Who's unhappy? Not me." It was Doug. Mason, young and harum-scarum. He was a clam digger—not a soft occupation. Everybody except prudes liked Doug. "Catch!" He lobbed an empty beer bottle.

Professor Gunn caught the bottle expertly, put it down, straightened again, was still for a moment. Then he went into action. With one rippling motion, he loosed the silken cord at his waist, peeled off his scarlet-edged robe—a flash of white trunks. But before the ladies had had time to gasp, he landed with a brisk clip of sandals and strode over to the jalopy.

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He stood with hands on hips, looking through the window at Doug. Mason. "My young friend," he said quietly, opening the door, "please step out!"

The laugh faded from Doug.'s flushed face. It was not difficult to know why; if this man Gunn had been stalwart in his robe, he was heroic without it. I had never seen such a bulwark of bone and muscle.

Doug. stepped out. He was no weakling himself. His face went redder.

"That was an impolite action, sir," said Gunn. "I did not provoke you. I must ask for an apology."

"*Me* apologize? I ain't gonna . . ." Doug. lunged at him.

The Professor had long arms and large fists. He held Doug. by the shirt collar with his left hand. Doug. struggled vainly.

"Does this gentleman owe me an apology for rudeness?" Gabriel Gunn looked round the circle. Most people nodded unwillingly. Amanda hissed: "*Yes!*"

"Please make your apology, sir."

For answer, Doug. flailed at the arm which held him captive.

"I am very sorry," said Gunn. He jerked with his left hand; hit from the waist with his right. It made a neat smack. Doug. crumpled. The Professor held him up, gathered him in his arms, put him back in the seat and closed the door. "Pray let us have peace," he said through the window to the others, turned and vaulted lightly into Slim Johnson's van.

"I must regret that incident, ladies and gentlemen," he said, face impassive. "I am not a bellicose man. He will awaken in a few minutes."

Behind us I could hear a murmuring stir run through the crowd—as well it might, for I do not imagine that in all Rockhaven's history so economical, so devastating, or so courteous an assault had ever been made. Absolute silence now fell.

"Peace, my friends! Ah, peace. The very thing we seek. But how many of us find it amid the bustle, the toil, the trouble of this world? How many of us can say at the end of the long day, 'I have known no discontented moment since I arose this morning?'" Eloquent, musical, soothing; then a sharp change into staccato: "*Can you?*"

He talked for five minutes in the spellbound hush. Long before that time was up, I realized we had a genius in our midst, a man with that rarest of human gifts—a magic tongue. The things he said had often been said before. They were sensible enough; they bore examination. But if they had been gibberish, it would have made no difference. I myself felt a division—on the one hand I

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was suspicious of a panacea—how, except in the blissful vacuum of heaven, can there be happiness without unhappiness? On the other hand, I admired a *tour de force*. I admired it reluctantly, perhaps enviously. This man had qualities I lacked. I glanced at Amanda. Her face was tilted up, her eyes shining in rapt attention.

"So, my friends, I shall not keep you longer now. Let this serve as our introduction to one another. Before we part, I must tell you that I have not come here for gain. I have come with humility to offer a new way, a new road. But there should be no misunderstanding—it is no light and easy way that I offer. The road to happiness runs hard uphill. How serenely, how wonderfully, how peacefully we rest at the summit."

"Tell me, Mr. Gunn,"—it was the cool mocking voice of Hermione—"what made you pick on Rockhaven?"

He bowed to her. It is difficult for a man to bow gracefully when clad only in white trunks and sandals, but the Professor did. There was no suspicion of fat at the twin ropes of his stomach muscles. "A charming young lady has asked me why I picked on Rockhaven. Picked on Rockhaven." He played with the phrase. "I came here because this is a rare and diversified community; because it is a fruitful field."

Hermione said no more. I saw her smile. Her wits had always been sharp. We had little in common except a partiality for the same jokes. But now I recognized a bond—that of rebellion. Amanda was looking angrily at her.

"For our next meeting, this evening, I should like to choose somewhere open, close beside the sea. Is there such an airy place?"

"How's about Seal Point?" said Hazen Starsen. One glance told me that Hazen was ensnared. The genius of this Gabriel Gunn seemed to be that he could make normally happy people feel that they were not nearly so happy as they should be.

"Yes, Seal Point," said other voices.

"Seal Point it shall be. Now, as to the time. Am I right in thinking that six-thirty would suit the majority of us?"

There was a chorus of agreement except from the summer colony. Napoleon Tantivy and Heatherwell Rankin looked dubiously at one another. Six o'clock onwards was a time sacred to the *apéritif*. But they shrugged their shoulders. I guessed that Naps. would adjust his drinking hours. He particularly admired eloquence—which he himself had—and great physical strength—which was one of the only forms of power denied him.

"At six-thirty, then, we shall consult our maps; we shall take the high road. Thank you." Gabriel Gunn bowed to all the

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people; gave a very slight personal bow to Amanda. Did he? Or was it my imagination? He put on his white robe with its golden cornucopia; jumped to the ground and strode for the second time to the jalopy, whose occupants sat in silence.

"I do apologize, sir," he said, extending his hand to Doug. Mason.

Doug. had sobered up; there was a dark swelling on his chin. He hesitated a moment; then sprang out of the car, smiled the endearing smile which had extricated him from many a scrape. "Say," he said. "You pack quite a mean little punch. Yessir." They shook hands.

Thus gracefully did Gabriel Gunn begin his conquest of Rockhaven.

"Well, what did you make of the Professor?" I asked at the car.

"I think he's quite wonderful," Amanda said. "Such a tremendous figure of a man." She never concealed her feelings and opinions; there was a barb, a little dagger, in the indifferent glance she cast upon my indifferent physique. "But it was typical of Hermione, trying to be funny like that. 'Picking on Rockhaven.' Really, she's unsufferably rude; I've a good mind to tell her so. My goodness, it's twelve o'clock. I'm late already."

"What about the shopping?"

"Oh, the shopping. You wouldn't mind walking home, would you, Harry dear? It's out of my way."

"I'm going to Hermione's too," I said. So we went to Hermione's pre-luncheon party. Summer life in Rockhaven is arduous. The social round, the dwindling flask.

"Are you going to the meeting this evening?" I asked as we turned into the drive.

"Of course I am."

"Could you pick me up?"

"Oh, all right," she said irritably. "Why don't you get a car of your own?"

"Because I can't afford one." I had said this often before.

"Well, why not work then, and earn some money; even enough to buy a bicycle?"

"I do my best," I said, sighing again. "Anyway, I can't ride a bike."

Amanda stopped in a rasp of gravel chips at the door of her friend and social rival. All the talk was of Professor Gunn. In the strange way of this world, he seemed to have captured everyone already—everyone, that is, except Hermione and myself. "Quite a laughable creature," she remarked. "Which reminds me, Harry. I do hope you're getting all you want."

"Thank you, Hermione," I said.

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There had been a large attendance at Gunn's introductory meeting, but it was nothing to the crowd at Seal Point that evening. Except for the young mothers and the very aged, almost every adult in Rockhaven must have been present. Even the Reverend Angus Lamond, our Presbyterian minister, and Father Malone, our Catholic priest—who are good friends—stood together in the background. They held a watching brief of manifest disapproval.

But Gabriel Gunn's precepts for the happy life in no way ran contrary to Christian ethics. As I have said, there was nothing original about his philosophy. He brought a powerful sincerity, a new impact to old ideas.

" Please sit down on the green grass," he said at the beginning. *The green grass.* Yes, it was flamboyant. We sat on the grass and listened to the rise and fall of that vibrant voice while the flood-tide lapped nearer, and gulls cried, and flocks of sandpipers swung dark, swung white, in their leash of unison.

Take time for life, was what he said. *Take time*, again and again in different ways. Take time to consider the beauty of the world, time to identify yourself with that beauty, time to achieve tranquillity. And if you lived in the rush and bustle of a city? Set aside a little time each day.

" Come," he said at the end of what may have been half an hour. " Come! Let us go all together and each alone to sit for a few quiet minutes by the sea." He sprang from the rock which had been his platform, and led us down to the shore. We sat all together and each alone. Absurd, you will think. No, it did not seem absurd with Gabriel Gunn. My every instinct revolted against this massed contemplation. And yet . . .

Afterwards we climbed back, young and old, limber and rheumatic, to the green grass of Seal Point. There, Professor Gunn sat down in the midst of the concourse to answer questions. I came near to him to be beside Amanda.

" This breathin' you mentioned, Professor," said Hazen Starsen diffidently. " Do you mean like exercises? " Again the rebel stirred in me. Hazen had a chest like a bull. Breathing exercises for him, indeed!

" In a sense I do, Mr. Starsen." He had picked up twenty or thirty names already. " With reservations. As we know from the Vedas, the Hindus learned long ago that the control of breathing helps towards the control of the mind. But we must never forget that it is a means to an end, and not an end in itself. We should train the body's machine with one purpose only—that it may serve the mind. That is why I abhor the so-called systems of physical culture, or physical jerks as they are vulgarly called."

" All physical jerks, Professor? " It was Hermione.

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There was a hint of steel in his courtly inclination. "All, Madam." Amanda stirred.

Napoleon Tantivy was next: "You spoke of the virtues of a simple diet.– I have recently been following a new regimen of yoghourt and molasses. I find this most beneficial."

"I concur heartily, sir. Furthermore, I would recommend such simple and excellent protein foods as fresh herring . . ." There was a murmur of surprise. The herring and the summer visitors are the main providers in our community, but nobody dreams of eating the former. "Yes, herring—the most nutritious fish in the ocean. And good baked beans, and whole-wheat bread for roughage, and fresh greens. We can thrive without sirloin steak at a dollar and a half a pound."

That was a remarkable thing about Gunn. He was recommending a poor man's diet to a very rich man. He did not pander. There was a universality in his appeal.

"What was it you said about liquor bein' an escape-hatch?" Doug. Mason was shaved and spruce. His bruise had subsided.

The Professor gave Doug. a warm smile. I had not seen him smile before. "My friend," he said, "what does strong drink do? It gives us a temporary illusion of well-being, a refuge from our self-discontent, our incompleteness. But it is a spurious escape-hatch. We feel worse afterwards, more dependent. An integrated man laughs at alcohol."

"Even beer?" asked Doug. painfully. I could see his mental struggle, and understand it. I guessed that Doug. did not drink beer because he was miserable. He was happy already; he drank beer because it made him still happier.

"Even beer," said Gabriel Gunn.

"You are a teetotaller yourself?" Hermione asked.

"I have no need to call myself that." It was a superb reply; but it ran like water off Hermione's graceful back.

"Darkness is falling. Shall we repair now . . .?"

"Just one question, Professor, if you will allow me," said Heatherwell Rankin. "Many important people, I understand, including no less a person, I believe, than Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru of India, find a remarkable efficacy and benefit in the inversion of the body, in the standing on the head for a daily period of several minutes. I would appreciate hearing your opinion of this practice, sir."

"I approve," the Professor said. "Blood courses to the head, freshens the brain, helps the machine to serve its purpose. But in moderation only. And now, goodnight, my friends. Thank you for your attention. I shall be here at six tomorrow, and I invite you to join me in an early morning walk, fair weather or foul. But

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I fancy it will be fair. Remember—five minutes of contemplation before bed."

"I wonder if the poor man has anywhere to stay," whispered Amanda; and, as is her nature, forthwith suited the action to the idea: "Professor, have you made plans for board and lodging? If not, would you care to be my guest?"

"Really, Amanda," I muttered. "Making a perfect exhibition of yourself." But I did not say it loud enough for her to hear.

"Dear lady," he said. "You are indeed kind. I sleep out of doors; may I have the pleasure of pitching my small tent in your garden?"

"Look, Amanda," I said while Gunn bent his head to answer a question from Bella Carver. "I don't think you ought to have this chap to stay. It isn't proper."

She was angry at once. "It's perfectly proper," she said. "With Mother there as chaperon. And what business is it of yours, Harry, if I may ask?"

"I don't want you to make a fool of yourself," I said miserably.

"Oh, go away!" she cried.

So I went away, and drove home with Hazen Starsen.

"That's a wonderful fellow," he said. "That's the kind of man we've been needin' in this town. Don't you think so, Harry?"

"No," I said. "I do not. Individuals have to work out their own salvation. I don't like this mob ecstasy."

"Well," said Hazen. "I guess he's made me feel better than I ever did before in my life."

"He's got you all intoxicated."

"He's got *you* all jealous," Hazen said. He dug me in the ribs; somehow that made me feel better. Hazen might have caught the bug, but he still had a sense of humour.

So it went on for a week. I hardly saw Amanda; whenever I did see her, she was worshipping at the Professor's feet. The thing grew too. It grew solidly in strength. The old lethargic atmosphere of do-as-you-please, of indolently catty gossip, of too much beer and too many old-fashioneds, disappeared. Every convert became an evangelist for the cause. The place changed character altogether.

What are they converted to? I asked myself a hundred times. *For heaven's sake, what?* But the fact remained that they were converted. "*Are you really happy too?*" they said to one another with shining eager faces. "*Yes, really and truly. It's so wonderful.*"

This was the state of affairs when Professor Gabriel Gunn led an excursion up our local mountain. I went too. We climbed the path in a winding procession, and came at last to the summit.

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There we sat, breathing deeply. It was another fine day. Below us was the wide panorama of sea and island, of lake and river, of birch and spruce. In the centre of the picture lay Rockhaven; beyond it, jutting squarely to sea, the green grass of Seal Point.

Only the Professor stood. Under the invariable toga, his chest swelled and subsided rhythmically. "The balanced body and mind," his voice rang out. "How well they enable us to contemplate this beauty." He stared at Seal Point.

We waited. I had an idea we were waiting for something.

"Professor!" It was Amanda, standing now too. Although she had always been lovely, this last week a dedicated radiance had grown about her. She was sweetness itself to all the world; but to me she had become so coldly disdainful that I kept my distance.

"Yes, Amanda?" He turned and gave her one of his rare smiles.

"I have a suggestion to make." She was nervous. "We've had perfect weather all week and everything's been perfect but sooner or later it's sure to rain again and I've been wondering what we can do about our meetings when it does rain cats and dogs. I mean some of us are not very young and they might catch chills so what I wonder is whether we couldn't build some kind of temple or pavilion where we could meet in bad weather—then if it was heated the villagers, I mean the townspeople, could use it in the winter."

She paused for breath.

"So why couldn't we have a subscription to buy the timber to build a temple on Seal Point, and we could all give our work for nothing of course and the design would be plain and functional and strong. I would like to subscribe myself." She sat down.

Oh, damn you, Amanda, I thought. *Why are you such an adorable beautiful idiot?*

"Thank you," said Gabriel Gunn, sombre. "What is the opinion of the meeting about this interesting suggestion?"

But that was a foregone conclusion. The idea took on like wildfire. There was a loud chorus of approval; then a hum of excited talk.

I rose to my feet. Nobody paid attention to me until the Professor called for silence. It fell instantly. He came over and stood beside me. I was sure he did it on purpose to make me feel puny. I hated the man. "Come, Mr. Ambley," he said. "We would welcome your views."

"I don't want to butt in," I said, conscious of unanimous hostility, "but I should like to remind you that Seal Point is town land, and you can't build even a shack on it without the passing of a special bye-law carried by a two-thirds majority of the Town Council." I sat down.

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" That's easily settled," said the Mayor, a podgy man, damp from his climb, a go-getter. " Hands up the Aldermen present." Eight hands rose immediately. " Call an Extraordinary Town Council Meeting on the spot. Meeting convened. Quorum. All in favour of project make a show of hands."

The same eight hands rose again, and the Mayor put up his own.

" That's nine out of eleven," he declared. " Better than two-thirds. Bye-law passed. So much for your objection, Ambley." He looked contemptuously at me and spat on a juniper bush.

They made Amanda treasurer, and she took round the hat. Ten-dollar bills crinkled plentifully. Napoleon Tantivy looked in his wallet, shook his head and said : " I'll send five hundred as soon as I get home, Amanda my dear."

Then Hermione stood up. " I'm a non-subscriber," she said, amused, cool, aloof. Amanda and the Professor had been up several evenings to her house to drink ginger-ale. I think he had hoped to convert her, but had failed. Of course, it was easy to see that Amanda was his favourite woman. " I'm a non-subscriber," she said again. The people looked at her with tolerance. I couldn't imagine why I should be the only one to inspire their animosity. " So it's none of my business what blissful buildings you put up. But I do wish you wouldn't call the thing a temple. I don't think Rockhaven should be made the laughing stock of the Eastern Seaboard."

" I do most heartily agree," said the Professor surprisingly. " We are not a quasi-religious cult. We are a free association of balanced and contented people."

" If I may make so bold as to venture a suggestion—and indeed with considerable diffidence." Heatherwell Rankin looked round. " It is that we set our hands to build, and ultimately get together in the *Gabriel Gunn Pavilion*. What is the sense of the meeting in this matter ? "

Echoing cheers gave answer. The Professor bowed but did not smile. " Let us go back now," he said. " Let us make a bee-line down this tangled hillside." They set off.

" Hullo, Bella," I said. " Where's Jim this evening ? " I referred to her young man, Jim Lake ; and I spoke to Bella Carver because I knew she was one of those gentle people who could never bear hostility, against me or anyone else.

She shrugged her shoulders. " He's over to Hog Island, Mr. Ambley." She had always insisted on addressing me thus formally. We started down together at the tail of the scattered company.

" What do you think of the Temple, I mean the Pavilion ? "

" Why, it sounds just lovely, Mr. Ambley." The hill was steep,

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the undergrowth thick, and our conversation spasmodic. "The Professor does say such beautiful things sometimes. So original."

"Such as, Bella?"

"He told me yesterday that to a mature man the freshness of youth is an unimaginable delight. That's exactly what he said."

"Did he now? It's hardly original, though."

It was just a moment later that I heard a noise in the alder scrub beside us. It was a little human sound, a muted cry. I looked. What I saw struck my heart cold; then a surge of jealousy and hatred came over me.

Amanda in her saffron beach-suit, Professor Gabriel Gunn in his white robe. They stood in sharp contrast to the green of the woods. They were kissing passionately.

We went on. How could I challenge that Hercules? We came to a clearing.

"Oh, you poor Harry," said Bella.

She took my hand like a young sister.

The voice was calling: "*Harry Ambley! Happy Ambley! Who took Amanda?*" That exultant bull-like voice.

But it was not the melodious bellow of Gabriel Gunn. It was the voice of Slim Johnson's cow, Jessie, from the pasture opposite my bedroom window. The time was five minutes to six, the sun was shining for another wretched day, and I had slept abominably. "Damn that animal," I grunted. She continued to moo.

I got out of bed and went to the window. Jessie was at the gate. She stood there every morning, waiting for Slim to come with his two buckets. She was a sad-eyed Guernsey in discomfort, a nice cow. I could not really bring myself to blame her. "Oh, shut up, Jessie!" I called. "Do shut up." She did not even turn to look at me. For weeks I had been meaning to complain to Slim, and had not done so. Nobody paid attention to my complaints.

I know what I'll do, I said to myself. *I'll take a sleeping pill and shut the window.* Thus, perhaps, I might achieve a few spurious hours of that peace the whole town was talking about.

I was reaching for the window when something appeared at the far corner of the pasture which caused me to stay my hand. A car was descending the hill. It was an open car—sky-blue—and it rolled to the corner, turned my way. It was Hermione's car, elegant and distinctive. *What on earth?* I thought, knowing that wild horses could not drag that lady out of bed before ten o'clock. Some gang must have stolen it.

But the car was not moving at a thief's pace. Furthermore, it was driven by a woman in matching blue. Yes, I could see now.

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Unbelievable, but Hermione was out at six, and she was not alone. Beside her sat a large man in white. Huge gusts and gales of laughter sounded in the still morning air. It was the first time I had heard Professor Gabriel Gunn laugh. He guffawed enormously; Hermione's laughter was a tinkle.

Then he reached down for something, and as the car drew near my window, I had an even greater surprise. He raised a bottle to his lips. I saw the label distinctly—a seal's head, trade mark of our local brew. The golden liquid exactly matched his cornucopia. The level sank as fast as you could have poured the stuff. He lobbed the bottle nonchalantly away. It struck poor Jessie on the ribs. She mooed.

As the car moved on towards the main road, I saw Gabriel Gunn put his great left paw over Hermione's slim hand on the steering wheel. He withdrew it to open another bottle of beer. In the back of the car was his white tent.

I waited till they were out of sight, till the happy sounds had died away, till the telephone rang. I went downstairs in a welter of confusion. It was too much, too early, too sudden.

"Hullo," I said.

"Harry!"

"Yes, Amanda?"

"He's gone, Harry! I woke up a minute ago and his tent isn't there and I can't find him anywhere."

"I know," I said, and added, "I've just seen Hermione drive off with him, tent and all."

"Hermione? *Hermione!* Oh, oh, oh . . ." Tears; then almost immediately the wild sorrow of laughter.

"Shut up, Amanda! I'm coming right over."

I pulled on shirt, trousers, shoes, and went right over—across Jessie's pasture, up the hill, down to Amanda's house on the shore. I observed the brown patch which was the imprint of the Professor's tent. I went inside.

Amanda wore a *peignoir* or bathrobe over flimsy night attire. Tears were on her cheeks; her eyes were heavy; her hair was tousled. She looked wonderful—flushed with sleep and anger. No sign of hysterics. In her hands she held a tin cash box. It was empty.

"The Pavilion subscriptions!" she cried. "He made me suggest the idea yesterday. We counted the money together last night. Twelve hundred and forty-two dollars, fifty. All gone!"

"What did you expect?" I said harshly.

"When I think of that man preaching to us for a whole week about being perfect and simple and happy and contented and I did my best to be hospitable to him and all the time he was nothing

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but a horrible crook. And Hermione! I always knew she was no better than . . ."

"Don't be a little idiot," I interrupted with new-found mastery. "Gabriel Gunn showed people the way to a fuller and better life. He did a great deal of lasting good for this place. It was cheap at the price, and he took no more than his just reward. As for your hospitable instincts, Amanda, the less said about those the better."

"Harry!" she gasped. Her lips had parted. "What's happened to you, Harry?"

"Nothing whatsoever except that I have seen the light of day. Come here at once, Amanda!"

She came close, eyes downcast. I took her in my arms and kissed her soundly, roundly, for several minutes.

"Oh, Harry!"

"Hurry up and get dressed," I said. "Then we shall go for one of your healthy morning walks along the shore. We shall breathe deeply but not too deeply, stand on our heads for two minutes, think beautiful thoughts, and return vastly hungered for a happy breakfast of whole-wheat roughage and fresh herring. Hurry up, now!" I gave her an indulgent spank.

Amanda came back in less than no time. I was perfectly right about Professor Gabriel Gunn. Everyone now agrees that it was worth the money, that his one-week mission brought lasting physical and moral benefits to the people of Rockhaven—not least to Harry Ambley.

* * *

SITTING PRETTY

A man I never saw before
Is sitting on the parlour floor,
He neither speaks nor goes away—
He has nowhere to go and nothing to say.

My Uncle, who has travelled wide,
Regards our visitor with pride,
And claims that even in Cathay
They either Speak or Go Away,

And Sister, who is Uncle's Niece,
Is all for calling the Police,
But Mother always hates a row—
So we never use the parlour now.

KENNETH HOPKINS

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DANCING OX

Young Kirongo and he went everywhere together

by LAURENCE KIRK

THE most fascinating part of Africa lies between the tropics of Cancer and Capricorn. North of one and south of the other are the great deserts, endless brown or yellow wastes, with a blazing summer heat, dry, stifling winds and no rainfall. It might be expected that the climate would become even more extreme as one approached the equator; but it is just the reverse. The brownness gradually becomes greenness, the hot sultry winds become stilled, and the sun shines down from a clear blue sky on a world of lush luxuriance.

Somewhere between these two regions, in a round thatched native hut, Kirongo was born, with all the ceremonial that attaches to an important birth. The country was a high, flat plateau with a rim of blue hills round the edge of it, and it was covered with scrub and intersected with dried-up watercourses. The scrub had long, sharp thorns which looked almost white in the clear bright sunlight.

All around there were different tribes with different customs. Far away to the south-west were some who even lived in cities; and the rich women members of these tribes had several voluminous dresses which they wore all at the same time, one on the top of the other. (Kirongo's tribesmen said that was because the women knew the dresses would be stolen if they left them in their huts.) In contrast to these, in the barren country to the north-west, there was a tribe where the men wore skins but the women did not wear clothes of any kind.

Kirongo's people thought this rather shocking. They saw nothing shocking in their own customs. For there it was the men who went almost naked. They wore one feather which was stuck into their hair at the back; while the women were clad in skins, or cotton material when they could get it, with a good deal of wire round their necks for ornament. You could not have telephones in that country because the women were so greedy for wire.

Unlike most of the tribes around, Kirongo's people did not make meal out of bananas, and they did not grow sweet potatoes or

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cassava either. The soil was too poor to grow anything. It produced just enough grazing for their herds of cattle and that was all. Even so, there was always an anxious six weeks at the end of the dry season when the tribe had to go farther and farther afield to find any grazing at all, and to dig deep down in the dried-up watercourses to get water for their animals. But they did not keep their herds for meat. That was only eaten at weddings and dances and other special feasts. The normal diet was milk, or milk mixed with blood which was drawn from a vein in the ox's neck. They made butter too, out of the milk; but as there was no bread, the women used to smear it on their bodies. The more buttered a woman was, the more attractive she was supposed to be.

Kirongo was a fascinating baby with bright, inquisitive eyes and short, fuzzy hair; and like the other babies of his tribe he never cried. He spent a good deal of the first two years of his life on his mother's back as she went about her daily business. She knew that he could not get into any trouble while he was there; and she covered him with a large calabash shaped like a tortoise-shell when the sun was very hot in the middle of the day.

Kirongo throve on the milk that he drank—there would be no blood mixed with it until his fourteenth year—and very soon he was walking quite steadily. Almost as soon as he could walk he was given the job of herding goats with some other small boys, and they wandered all over the country with the herd, looking for grazing.

As he wandered he began to notice things in the world he lived in. How the sun rose over one distant mountain and set over another. How the clouds in one quarter meant rain and how the same sort of clouds in another quarter meant nothing at all. He learned how hard and sharp the thorns were on the scrub, and that there might be scorpions lurking in the hot crevices in the rocks. He began to notice the strange birds and animals that shared the dry, sunny world with them. There were very few animals because there was not enough for them to eat. Sometimes a herd of brown-eyed gazelles was seen, but that was only when the grass sprang up after the sudden rains. Once or twice he had seen a giraffe in the distance, but they were very rare; and the only other animals that he knew were the hyrax, which lived in colonies, like very portly and important rabbits, where there was an outcrop of smooth rock.

Of birds, on the other hand, there was an abundance. Ostriches roamed about the plateau on their stilt-like legs. Cranes and storks and hornbills were always to be seen; widow-birds with their long tails; weaver-birds with their incessant chatter; brightly coloured starlings, grey doves, little blue finches and iridescent sunbirds. Kirongo learned the names of all of them; he learned also the

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name of the strange creature who lived all alone in the house on the hill. He was the Deecee, or man with the motor-car.

He had blue eyes and a brown sun helmet as well as clothes, and he worked for another white chief whom they never saw at all. But as long as the tribesmen paid their taxes and did not kill each other, he did not interfere ; and he had found some wells for them where they could water the cattle when the rivers dried up.

Kirongo had heard whispers that something very important was going to happen on his seventh birthday, but the secret was well kept and he did not know what it was until it happened. As Kirongo was going to be Chief one day he was given a dancing ox by his father. The whole tribe was gathered in the space between the huts when Kirongo's father brought in the little brown ox with the bell tied round its neck and gave it to Kirongo to be his very own. As Kirongo put his arm round its neck, his father explained that from that day forward he and the ox would go everywhere together. The ox did not dance, though Kirongo could try to teach it if he liked. But from now on Kirongo himself would go to all the feasts and dances when the tribes were gathered together, and the ox must always go with him to show that he was a chief's son. And he must look after the ox because it would be a very bad omen if anything happened to it. He must feed the ox especially well because years later, when the time came for him to marry, the ox would be killed and eaten at the feast.

The ox was a soft-eyed creature, not very intelligent, but most willing, and Kirongo grew very fond of it ; the two of them were inseparable wherever they went. Sometimes, for fun, Kirongo used to hide from the ox, and then there would be a great commotion and tinkling of the bell as the ox anxiously hunted for him. They lived together in the same hut and Kirongo used the nice soft flank of the ox as a cushion for his head. Sometimes, too, when no one was looking, he tried to teach the ox to dance : but it cannot be said that the ox showed much aptitude for it. When Kirongo went to feasts and dances the ox was always tethered nearby ; and in the early morning when the dance was over the two of them would go back to their own village, and Kirongo would sing aloud to himself as the sun came up over the hills. Those were very happy days for them both.

Unfortunately, all this time Kirongo was growing up and quite soon it was his fourteenth birthday. That was a very important date in a boy's life. For one thing, he drank blood mixed with the milk for the first time. Kirongo, for his part, did not like it at all ; but he knew that it would never do to show that and he gulped it down bravely. However, the blood with the milk was a minor matter. The really important thing about that birthday was that all

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the relations began to put their heads together about choosing a bride for the young man.

If he had been a person of no importance Kirongo might have had some say in selecting his bride. There was, in fact, a girl he rather liked, with soft brown eyes, just like those of the dancing ox ; but he knew that she belonged to the wrong tribe and could not possibly marry him. So he kept well away from her. He understood that terrible things could happen if one got mixed up with a woman of the wrong tribe.

There were only two tribes that Kirongo could marry into ; the ostrich tribe and the giraffe tribe ; a total of about twenty possible young women. But these tribesmen were afflicted with the same problem that troubles the most civilized nations, namely, the cost of living. And to them, in their simple state, the cost of living—apart from the small head-tax—was represented by one item only : the bride price. In the good old days, four cows was the price of any bride. Since then it had always been a sellers' market and the bride price had risen steadily to fifty or sixty cows.

Supply and demand came into it to a certain extent. The ostrich tribe had eight brides on the market against twelve for the giraffe tribe. The former were therefore demanding the maximum price of sixty cows. Kirongo's father was a thrifty man ; it was he who would have to pay over the cows out of his own herd, and he decided that Kirongo would be very happy with a bride from the giraffe tribe, who were demanding only fifty cows.

Kirongo was not consulted while these arguments were going on. He roamed the country as usual with his dancing ox ; but he was doing a good deal of thinking in a quiet way. Of course, it would be nice to have a woman of his own, but it meant that it would be the end of the dancing ox. And he could not see that life would ever be the same without his ox.

Meanwhile, the field was being narrowed down. It was a magnificent thing for a man to have a son. On the other hand, if he had too many sons he was liable to be ruined, while daughters were a gilt-edged investment which was still going up in value. So Kirongo's relatives wanted a wife who would produce, say, one son for Kirongo and two daughters. With this end in view they examined the families of each of the candidates, noting how many brothers and sisters the girl had and how many aunts and uncles. In the end everything pointed to Laluga as a suitable bride. There were three times as many women in her family as there were men.

Kirongo had never met Laluga, who lived in a village fifteen miles away. He did not meet her until the betrothal ceremony which took place towards sunset on his sixteenth birthday. On

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that occasion both tribes gathered together in Kirongo's village. After some haggling over the cows that were going to be paid as the bride price, they all collected round the dancing floor for feasting and entertainment. At this stage Kirongo and Laluga were not even allowed to speak to each other. She sat on the south side of the dancing floor and he on the north side, and they were supposed just to gaze at each other longingly. This is what they did. But after Kirongo had gazed at her hard little eyes and well-buttered shoulders for half an hour he came to a very definite conclusion.

He much preferred his dancing ox.

According to the tribe's law, Kirongo had the right to refuse his bride the day after the betrothal ceremony; but it was a right that had not been exercised for eight generations. Besides, if he did refuse the bride chosen for him it would mean abdication from his position of future chief, and the dancing ox would be taken away and given to his successor. So Kirongo went about as usual and said nothing of what was in his mind.

In any case, he had a whole year to think out a plan; for his wedding would not take place until his seventeenth birthday and he would not see Laluga again until the night of the ceremony. But he knew exactly what would happen then, for he had been at the weddings of other chiefs' sons. The bride's mother, who had the same small hard eyes as Laluga, would come to his hut at sunset and give him a long sharp knife with which to slaughter the ox. And he would have to do the slaughtering himself in front of all the gathered tribesmen before the feasting and the dancing began.

Kirongo was quite determined that that should not happen, but he had no illusions about the many difficulties in front of him. If he and the dancing ox escaped some time before the wedding, their absence would be discovered and all the tribes would come out with spears to bring them in. They would both be killed quietly in such a manner as to satisfy the Deecee on the hill that it was an accident. The better chance was to make the escape the night before the wedding; for during the whole night and the whole day before the ceremony he had to stay in his hut with the ox and must not be spoken to or seen by anyone. If his absence was not discovered until the last minute there was a very good chance that the wedding would develop into a free fight between the giraffe tribe and the ostrich tribe, and that they would be too busy knocking each other over the head to pursue him and the ox.

However, even supposing he escaped the spears of the angry tribesmen, there were still many dangers ahead. What, for instance, was Kirongo going to live on as he wandered over the barren country? If only the ox had been a cow there would have been no difficulty, for Kirongo could have lived, as he was accustomed

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to do, on the milk of the cow. At this stage a certain coolness sprang up between Kirongo and the dancing ox simply because the latter was not a cow. But the ox remained as amiable as ever and Kirongo forgave him. He had decided that he would have to brave the lions and leopards in the mountains; because there were mines at the far side, and if Kirongo once got there he would be able to earn enough to support both himself and the dancing ox.

So Kirongo behaved as though he were going through with the ceremony. The tribes gathered at the appointed time. The fires were lit for the roasting of the dancing ox. Laluga's mother, after counting the fifty cows and seeing that there were fifty, not forty-nine, came with the sharp knife to Kirongo's hut and called his name. There was no answer. When she had called his name three times and still nothing happened, Kirongo's father undid the door and went into the hut with a worried look on his face. When he came out he had to confess that neither the bridegroom nor the ox was there. Then, of course, the fat was in the fire.

It was a deadly insult to the whole giraffe tribe and they picked up their spears and started shouting. Some of the older men tried to maintain order, but it was no good. Stones were thrown. Huts were set on fire. Finally, some of the young men of the ostrich tribe, who really had nothing to do with it, thought it a good opportunity to obtain brides without paying and started to pursue all the girls there into the undergrowth. Soon everyone was involved in the fight and no one gave a thought either to Kirongo or the dancing ox.

The District Commissioner first learned of the trouble when one of his two policemen came panting up the hill on a bicycle. At once he got into his car and went down to the village, where the wind-screen and head-lamps were immediately smashed with stones. The District Commissioner hurried back to his house and sent an SOS by wireless for reinforcements.

The next day jeeps and armoured cars began to arrive; but it was a whole week before the tribes could be sorted out and confined to their villages. After that statements were taken, files opened, and reports made. As no adequate reason could be discovered for the disturbance, it was generally agreed that it was due to the influence of agitators, and a communiqué to that effect was issued to the Press. In the meantime, stolen cattle had to be rounded up and restored to the owners, stolen girls to their families and compensations paid. Steps were taken, too, to deflate the swollen bride price which seemed to be at the root of the trouble.

It was six weeks before the last of the senior reporting officials departed and the D.C. was able to relax on his verandah as the sun set over the distant peaceful hills.

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He was very tired. As he poured out his second drink, he wondered vaguely whether there could be any truth in the strange story about Kirongo and the dancing ox. The D.C. was never quite certain whether or not he fell asleep after that; but a little later he distinctly saw a native and an ox dancing on his lawn, and the ox was dancing on its hind legs just like a man. He immediately took two aspirins and applied the next day for leave.

That D.C. has been succeeded by several other D.C.s. None of them has ever discovered what really happened to Kirongo; but if any white man in that country takes one whisky too many, he is very liable to see an ox and a man dancing in front of him.

* * *

TRAVELLERS' JOY

—though by no means an unmixed pleasure, in these conveyances ancient and modern. Allow one point for recognizing each vehicle, one for the source and one for the author, making twenty-seven in all. The answers are on page 62.

1. *The result may have been animal, vegetable and mineral, but the origin was purely vegetable!*
2. *No joke, a dark cold ride on a night in November, in a tight Petersham coat and your feet dangling six inches from the floor. No joke even for a boy with a head full of dreams . . .*
3. *She might ride in the streets of London in a green silken gown, but "O no sir, O no sir," alas she answered me!*
4. *Shining with newness and canary-yellow paint, all complete and nothing forgotten, it was meant for the idyllic life, and—all too temporarily—its owner's pride and joy.*
5. *"What peace," said he, "so long as . . . her witchcrafts are so many?" And so, from this furiously driven vehicle two kings were slain.*
6. *See, here it comes at last—dressed up and gay with Country Art —and all the Rurall Younglings to do it honour!*
7. *How quietly and easily a man could live, thought the passengers as they gazed down to the green pastures of the valley in the hills. No poverty, no trouble, time to think . . .*
8. *She had hastened to London and lost her name once more, and there she watched him, splendid and unrepentant, driving by . . .*
9. *From the direction of the peak, glittering in icy splendour, it came, and out stepped the person robed in blue, grey-haired and pallidly decorative in his silk embroidered gown.*

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WARRIORS IN WHITE

An honest man, look you, . . . a marvellous good neighbour, faith, and a very good bowler

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *Love's Labour's Lost*

In the leafy month of June, when old Sol progresses to his height of passion and sluggish draughts move gently through the vibrating light of a drowsy noontide, ruffling the dainty plumage of sweetly trilling songsters performing their ablutions in shaded pools, it is then that the panting climber of the precipitous paths of Parnassus longingly looks with lingering gaze over the seething masses of the madding crowd toiling intently in dusty thoroughfares to green fields dotted with white figures . . .

J. M. BARRIE, *The Allahakbarries*

Ritual

Cricket to us, like you, was more than play,
It was a worship in the summer sun,
And when Tom Fletcher in the month of May
Went to the field, the feet of many a boy
Scarce pressed the buttercups ; then we stood there
Rapt, as he took the bat and lit day's close,
Gliding and glancing, guiding fine or square
The subtlest bowls, and smoothing, as wave-wise
Rough-hurled they rose,
With a sweet sureness ; his especial ease
Did what huge sinews could not ; to a hair
His grey eye measured, and from the far trees
Old watchers lobbed the ball with merry cries.

EDMUND BLUNDEN, *Pride of the Village*

Well Held, Sir !

This was the last over, and Bloody Bourton wanted two runs to win. Even the Colonel sat up tensely and put his flask away in his pocket. Everybody was on his toes with the solitary exception of Briggs, who was standing deep at long-on where for a long time he had had nothing to do. I noticed a faint blue haze hanging about him in the still evening air ; I looked again, and perceived that Briggs was lighting his pipe.

Alfie came up to the wicket with his familiar hop, skip and jump, tousled fair hair falling into his eyes. The Bloody Bourton captain, whose success in hitting a six had gone to his head, ran down the

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pitch and hit the ball high towards long-on. Everybody looked at Briggs; but Briggs, with his big hands cupping a match, was still puffing away at his pipe. The whole team yelled at him . . . Only Goaty Pegleg, who had not yet tumbled to what was happening, remained silent. At last Briggs looked up, and saw the ball falling towards him. He did not move. Without hurry he put the box of matches into his left pocket and the pipe into his right pocket. Then, as one who receives manna from heaven he extended his enormous hands in front of him. The ball fell into them, the strong fingers closed as if they would squeeze it out of shape. Finally, still without hurry, he removed his pipe from his pocket lest it burn his trousers.

When the cheering was over there was a little silence while Joe Trentfield pulled up the stumps and the team came back towards the pavilion. Then Goaty Pegleg announced in a loud voice, *urbi et orbi*: "He's caught it! We've won!"

JOHN MOORE, *Brensham Village*

Wide

Once as I read through wastes of prose,
And wearied of the labour,
These words tremendously arose
Like sudden flash of sabre,
"When umpire Lee
Was hit on the knee
By a very fast ball from Faber."

'Twas but a humble cricket match
And but a daily's pages,
And yet it somehow seemed to catch
A splendour from the ages
When poetry
Was apt to be
The diction of the sages.

There stood these scintillating lines,
Mere common prose their neighbour,
To cheer us as a light that shines,
Or sound of pipe and tabor,
"When umpire Lee
Was hit on the knee
By a very fast ball from Faber."

LORD DUNSANY

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Armchair Bowler

It is said that it is utterly impossible to convey with the pen an idea of the grand effect of Harris's bowling. His attitude, when preparing to deliver the ball, was masculine, erect, and appalling. First, he stood like a soldier at drill, upright. Then with a graceful and elegant curve, he raised the fatal ball to his forehead, and drawing back his right foot, started off. Woe be to the unlucky wight who did not know how to stop these cannonades! His fingers would be ground to the dust against the bat, his bones pulverized, and his blood scattered over the field. Lord F. Beauclerk has been heard to say, that Harris's bowling was one of the grandest sights in the universe. Like the Pantheon, in Akenside's Hymn, it was "simply and severely great." Harris was terribly afflicted with the gout; it was at length difficult for him to stand; a great armchair was therefore always brought into the field, and after the delivery of the ball, the hero sat down in his own calm and simple grandeur, and reposed.

REV. JOHN MITFORD, *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 1833

Over

To Cricket's shrine I offer'd day by day,
Pace, length, and spin, swervers that "ran away;"
For Cricket I threw Tennis down the drain,
Abjur'd my mashie—abjuration vain;
For England's game I bowl'd on English muds,
Bowl'd to a field of never-ending duds;
Heard, while the catches droop'd, the river's call,
The pop of Bass, the punt pole's sleepy fall;
Beheld each Over, Slips' unpleasing face,
And wonder'd why Short-leg was not in place;
Till God, who saw me tried too sorely, gave
The resting place I ask'd—a Bowler's grave;
O thou, whom chance leads to this nameless stone—
Come with a battl'd trundler, or alone;
By Wides, No Balls, by Extra Covers stout,
By l.b.w.'s miscall'd Not Out
One last appeal. Let fall a kindred tear
O'er Bowler's dust. A broken heart lies here.

R. C. ROBERTSON-GLASGOW, *The Brighter Side of Cricket*.

Backward Point

The only athletic sport I ever mastered was backgammon.

DOUGLAS JERROLD

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ROMANTIC YOUNG LADY

Now the duchess had an only daughter, infinitely alluring . . .

by W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM

ONE of the many inconveniences of real life is that it seldom gives you a complete story. Some incident has excited your interest, the people who are concerned in it are in the devil's own muddle, and you wonder what on earth will happen next. Well, generally nothing happens. The inevitable catastrophe you foresaw wasn't inevitable after all, and high tragedy, without any regard to artistic decency, dwindles into drawing-room comedy. Now, growing old has many disadvantages, but it has this compensation (among, let us admit, not a few others), that sometimes it gives you the opportunity of seeing what was the outcome of certain events you had witnessed long ago. You had given up the hope of ever knowing what was the end of the story, and then, when you least expected it, it is handed to you on a platter.

These reflections occurred to me when, having escorted the Marquesa de San Esteban to her car, I went back into the hotel and sat down again in the lounge. I ordered a cocktail, lit a cigarette and composed myself to order my recollections. The hotel was new and splendid, it was like every other first-class hotel in Europe, and I had been regretting that for the sake of its modern plumbing I had deserted the old-fashioned, picturesque Hotel de Madrid to which I generally went when I stayed in Seville. It was true that from my hotel I had a view of the noble river, the Guadalquivir, but that did not make up for the *thés dansants* that filled the bar-lounge two or three days a week with a fashionable crowd whose exuberant conversation almost drowned the strident din of a jazz orchestra.

I had been out all the afternoon, and coming in found myself in the midst of a seething mob. I went to the desk and asked for my key so that I might go straight up to my room. But the porter, handing it to me, said that a lady had been asking for me.

"She wants to see you very much. It's the Marquesa de San Esteban."

I knew no one of that name. "It must be some mistake."

As I said the words, looking rather vaguely around, a lady came

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up to me with outstretched hands and a bright smile on her lips. To the best of my knowledge I had never seen her before in my life. She seized my hands, both of them, and shook them warmly. She spoke in fluent French.

"How very nice to see you again after all these years. I saw by the paper that you were staying here and I said to myself: I must look him up. How many years is it since we danced together? I daren't think. Do you still dance? I do. And I'm a grandmother. I'm fat of course, I don't care, and it keeps me from getting fatter."

She talked with such a rush that it took my breath away to listen to her. She was a stout, more than middle-aged woman, very much made up, with dark red hair, obviously dyed, cut short; and she was dressed in the height of Parisian fashion, which never suits Spanish women very well. But she had a gay, fruity laugh that made you feel you wanted to laugh too. It was quite obvious that she thoroughly enjoyed life. She was a fine figure of a woman and I could well believe that in youth she had been beautiful. But I could not place her.

"Come and drink a glass of champagne with me and we will talk of old times. Or will you have a cocktail? Our dear old Seville has changed, you see. *Thés dansants* and cocktails. It's just like Paris and London now. We've caught up."

She led me to a table near the space where they were dancing and we sat down. I could not go on pretending I was at ease; I thought I should only get into a fearful mess.

"It's terribly stupid of me, I'm afraid," I said, "but I don't seem able to remember ever having known anyone of your name in the old days in Seville."

"San Esteban?" she interrupted before I could go on. "Naturally. My husband came from Salamanca. He was in the diplomatic service. I'm a widow. You knew me as Pilar Carreon. Of course having my hair red changes me a little, but otherwise I don't think I've altered much."

"Not at all," I said quickly. "It was only the name that bothered me."

Of course now I remembered her, but I was concerned at the moment only with the effort to conceal from her the mingled consternation and amusement that filled me as I realized that the Pilar Carreon I had danced with at the Countess de Marbella's parties and at the Fair had turned into this stout, flaunting dowager. I could not get over it. But I had to watch my step. I wondered if she knew how well I recollected the story that had shaken Seville to its foundations, and I was glad when after she had finally bidden me an effusive farewell I was able to recall it at ease.

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In those days, forty years ago, Seville had not become a prosperous commercial city. It had quiet, white streets, paved with cobbles, with a multitude of churches on the belfries of which storks built their nests. Bull-fighters, students and loungers sauntered in the Sierpes all day long. Life was easy.

This of course, was before the time of motor cars, and the Sevillan would live in penury, practising every possible economy, in order to have a carriage. For this luxury he was willing to sacrifice the necessities of life. Everyone who had any claim to gentility drove up and down the Delicias, the park-like gardens by the Guadalquivir, every blessed afternoon from five till seven. You saw carriages of all sorts, from fashionable London victorias to old broken-down shays that seemed as though they would fall to pieces, magnificent horses and wretched hacks whose tragic end in the bull-ring was near at hand. But there was one equipage that could not fail to attract the stranger's attention.

It was a victoria, very smart and new, drawn by two beautiful mules; and the coachman and the footman wore the national costume of Andalusia in pale grey. It was the most splendid turn-out Seville had ever known, and it belonged to the Countess de Marbella. She was a Frenchwoman married to a Spaniard, who had enthusiastically adopted the customs of her husband's country, but with a Parisian elegance that gave them a peculiar distinction. The rest of the carriages went at a snail's pace so that their occupants could see and be seen, but the countess, behind her mules, dashed up between the two crawling lines at a fast trot, went to the end of the Delicias and back twice and then drove away.

The proceeding savoured somewhat of royalty. When you looked at her gracefully seated in that swift victoria, her head handsomely poised, her hair of too brilliant a gold to be natural, you did not wonder that her French vivacity and determination had given her the position she held. She made the fashion. Her decrees were law. But the countess had too many adorers not to have as many enemies, and the most determined of these was the widowed Duchess de Dos Palos, whose birth and social consequence made her claim as a right the first place in Society which the Frenchwoman had won by grace, wit and character.

Now the duchess had an only daughter. This was Doña Pilar. She was twenty when I first knew her and she was very beautiful. She had magnificent eyes and a skin that, however hard you tried to find a less hackneyed way to describe it, you could only call peach-like. She was very slim, rather tall for a Spanish girl, with a red mouth and dazzlingly white teeth. She wore her abundant, shining black hair dressed very elaborately in the Spanish style of the period. She was infinitely alluring. The fire in her black

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eyes, the warmth of her smile, the seductiveness of her movements suggested so much passion that it really wasn't quite fair.

She belonged to the generation which was straining to break the old conventions that had kept the Spanish girl of good family hidden away till it was time for her to be married. I often played tennis with her and I used to dance with her at the Countess de Marbella's parties. The duchess considered the Frenchwoman's parties, with champagne and a sit-down supper, ostentatious, and when she opened her own great house to Society, which was only twice a year, it was to give them lemonade and biscuits. But she bred fighting-bulls, as her husband had done, and on the occasions when the young bulls were tried out, she gave picnic luncheons to which her friends were asked, very gay and informal, but with a sort of feudal state which fascinated my romantic imagination.

Once, when the duchess's bulls were to fight at a *corrida* in Seville, I rode in with them at night as one of the men escorting Doña Pilar, dressed in a costume that reminded one of a picture by Goya, who headed the cavalcade. It was a charming experience to ride through the night, on those prancing Andalusian horses, with the six bulls, surrounded by oxen, thundering along behind.

A good many men, rich or noble and sometimes both, had asked Doña Pilar's hand in marriage, but, notwithstanding her mother's remonstrances, she had refused them. The duchess had been married at fifteen and it seemed to her really indecent that her daughter at twenty should be still single. The duchess asked her what she was waiting for; it was absurd to be too difficult. It was her duty to marry. But Pilar was stubborn. She found reasons to reject every one of her suitors.

Then the truth came out.

During the daily drives in the Delicias which the duchess, accompanied by her daughter, took in a great old-fashioned landau, they passed the countess as she was twice swiftly driven up and down the promenade. The ladies were on such bad terms that they pretended not to see one another, but Pilar could not keep her eyes off that smart carriage and the two beautiful grey mules and, not wishing to catch the countess's somewhat ironic glance, her own fell on the coachman. He was the handsomest man in Seville and in his beautiful uniform he was a sight to see.

Of course no one knew exactly what happened, but apparently the more Pilar looked at the coachman the more she liked the look of him, and somehow or other, for all this part of the story remained a mystery, the pair met. In Spain the classes are strangely mingled and the butler may have in his veins much nobler blood than the master. Pilar learnt, not I think without satisfaction, that the coachman belonged to the ancient family of Leon, than

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which there is none in Andalusia more distinguished; and really so far as birth went there was little to choose between them. Only her life had been passed in a ducal mansion while fate had forced him to earn his living on the box of a victoria. Neither could regret this, since only in that exalted place could he have attracted the attention of the most difficult young woman in Seville. They fell madly in love with one another.

It so happened that just then a young man called the Marques de San Esteban, whom they had met at San Sebastian the summer before, wrote to the duchess and asked for Pilar's hand in marriage. He was extremely eligible and the two families had formed alliances from time to time ever since the reign of Philip II. The duchess was determined not to stand any more nonsense, and when she told Pilar of the proposal added that she had shilly-shallied long enough. She must either marry him or she should go into a convent.

"I'm not going to do either the one or the other," said Pilar.

"What are you going to do then? I have given you a home long enough."

"I'm going to marry José Leon."

"Who is he?"

Pilar hesitated for a moment and it may be, it is indeed to be hoped, that she blushed a little.

"He's the countess's coachman."

"What countess?"

"The Countess de Marbella."

I remembered the duchess well and I am sure that when roused she stuck at little. She raged, she implored, she cried, she argued. There was a terrific scene. People said that she slapped her daughter and pulled her hair, but I have an impression that Pilar in such a pass was capable of hitting back. She repeated that she loved José Leon and he loved her. She was determined to marry him. The duchess called a family council. The matter was put before them and it was decided that to save them all from disgrace Pilar should be taken away to the country and kept there till she had recovered from her infatuation. Pilar got wind of the scheme and put a stop to it by slipping out of the window of her room one night when everyone was asleep and going to live with her lover's parents. They were respectable persons who inhabited a small apartment on the unfashionable side of the Guadalquivir, in the quarter called Triana.

After that no concealment was possible. The fat was in the fire and the clubs along the Sierpes buzzed with the scandal. Waiters were kept busy bringing trays of little glasses of Manzanilla to the members from the neighbouring wine-shops. They gossiped

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and laughed over the scandal and Pilar's rejected suitors were the recipients of many congratulations. What an escape!

The duchess was in despair. She could think of nothing better to do than go to the Archbishop, her trusted friend and former confessor, and beg him himself to reason with the infatuated girl. Pilar was summoned to the episcopal palace, and the good old man, used to intervening in family quarrels, did his utmost to show her the folly of her course. But she would not be persuaded. Nothing that anyone could say would induce her to forsake the man she loved. The duchess, waiting in an adjoining room, was sent for and made a final appeal to her daughter. In vain. Pilar returned to her humble lodging and the duchess in tears was left alone with the Archbishop.

The Archbishop was no less astute than he was pious, and when he saw that the distracted woman was in a fit state to listen to him, advised her as a last resource to go to the Countess de Marbella. She was the cleverest woman in Seville and it might be that she could do something.

At first the duchess indignantly refused. She would never suffer the humiliation of appealing to her greatest enemy. Sooner might the ancient house of Dos Palos fall in ruin. The Archbishop was accustomed to dealing with tiresome women. He set himself with gentle cunning to induce her to change her mind and presently she consented to throw herself on the Frenchwoman's mercy. With rage in her heart she sent a message asking if she might see her, and that afternoon was ushered into her drawing-room. The countess of course had been one of the first to hear the story, but she listened to the unhappy mother as though she had not known a thing about it. She relished the situation enormously. It was the crowning triumph to have the vindictive duchess on her knees before her. But she was at heart a good-natured woman and she had a sense of humour.

"It's a most unfortunate situation," she said. "And I'm sorry that one of my servants should be the occasion of it. But I don't exactly see what I can do."

The duchess would have liked to slap her painted face and her voice trembled a little with the effort she made to control her anger.

"It is not for my own sake I'm asking you to help. It's for Pilar's. I know, we all know, that you are the cleverest woman in the city. It seemed to me, it seemed to the Archbishop, that if there was a way out, your quick wit would find it."

The countess knew she was being grossly flattered. She did not mind. She liked it. "You must let me think."

"Of course, if he'd been a gentleman I could have sent for my son and he would have killed him, but the Duke of Dos Palos

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cannot fight a duel with the Countess de Marbella's coachman."

"Perhaps not."

"In the old days it would have been so simple. I should merely have hired a couple of ruffians and had the brute's throat cut one night in the street. But with all these laws they have nowadays decent people have no way of protecting themselves from insult."

"I should deplore any method of settling the difficulty that deprived me of an excellent coachman," murmured the countess.

"But if he marries my daughter he cannot continue to be your coachman," cried the duchess indignantly.

"Are you going to give Pilar an income for them to live on?"

"Me? Not a peseta. I told Pilar at once that she should get nothing from me. They can starve for all I care."

"Well, I should think rather than do that he will prefer to stay on as my coachman. There are very nice rooms over my stables."

The duchess went pale. The duchess went red.

"Forget all that has passed between us. Let us be friends. You can't expose me to such a humiliation. If I've ever done things to affront you I ask you on my knees to forgive me."

The duchess cried.

"Dry your eyes, Duchess," the Frenchwoman said at last. "I will do what I can."

"Is there anything you can do?"

"Perhaps. Is it true that Pilar has and will have no money of her own?"

"Not a penny if she marries without my consent."

The countess gave one of her brightest smiles. "There is a common impression that southern people are romantic and northern people matter-of-fact. The reverse is true. It is the northerners who are incurably romantic. I have lived long enough among you Spaniards to know that you are nothing if not practical."

The duchess was too broken to resent openly these unpleasant remarks, but, oh, how she hated the woman! The Countess de Marbella rose to her feet.

"You shall hear from me in the course of the day."

She firmly dismissed her visitor.

The carriage was ordered for five o'clock and at ten minutes to, the countess sent for José. When he came into the drawing-room, wearing his pale grey livery with such an air, she could not deny that he was very good to look upon. If he had not been her own coachman—well, it was not the moment for ideas of that sort. He stood before her, holding himself easily, but with a gallant swagger. There was nothing servile in his bearing.

"A Greek god," the countess murmured to herself. "It is only Andalusia that can produce such types." And then aloud

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"I hear that you are going to marry the daughter of the Duchess of Dos Palos."

"If the countess does not object."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Whoever you marry is a matter of complete indifference to me. You know of course that Doña Pilar will have no fortune."

"Yes, madam. I have a good place and I can keep my wife. I love her."

"I can't blame you for that. She is a beautiful girl. But I think it only right to tell you that I have a rooted objection to married coachmen. On your wedding day you leave my service. That is all I had to say to you. You can go."

She began to look at the daily paper that had just arrived from Paris, but José did not stir. He stared down at the floor. Presently the countess looked up. "What are you waiting for?"

"I never knew madam would send me away," he answered in a troubled tone.

"I have no doubt you'll find another place."

"Yes, but . . ."

"Well, what is it?" she asked sharply.

He sighed miserably. "There's not a pair of mules in the whole of Spain to come up to ours. They're almost human beings. They understand every word I say to them."

The countess gave him a smile that would have turned the head of anyone who was not madly in love already.

"I'm afraid you must choose between me and your betrothed."

He shifted from one foot to the other. He put his hand to his pocket to get himself a cigarette, but then, remembering where he was, restrained the gesture. He glanced at the countess and that peculiar shrewd smile came over his face which those who have lived in Andalusia know so well.

"In that case, I can't hesitate. Pilar must see that this alters my position entirely. One can get a wife any day of the week, but a place like this is found only once in a lifetime. I should be a fool to throw it up for a woman."

That was the end of the adventure. José Leon continued to drive the Countess de Marbella, but she noticed when they sped up and down the Delicias that thenceforward as many eyes were turned on her handsome coachman as on her latest hat; and a year later Pilar married the Marques de San Esteban.

* * *

Walking isn't a lost art—one must, by some means, get to the garage.

EVAN ESAR

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GENTLEMEN'S AGREEMENT

A trout and an otter—what could a man do against such an alliance?

by WILLIAM MacMILLAN

EVERYTHING about the pool in the lower reaches of the mountain-fed Kicking Horse was king size—the gnarled old trees that crowded the granite banks, the massive boulders that guarded the inlet like a file of moss-bearded sentinels, and the eight-pound, red-bellied trout that made his home in the Stygian depths.

As far as Char, the trout, was concerned, the pool was just what the doctor ordered. In winter, there was lots of space under the canopy of ice and an intriguing patch of open water at the foot of the rapids. In summer, when the Kicking Horse dozed in the drought and the drone of short-lived insects filled the air, the cool depths insulated him from the heat and the shallows provided him with an unfailing supply of vitamins.

Though he was not, of course, conscious of it, he tuned his moods and fancies to the cadence of the rapids that fed the pool—relaxing with the soft, lazy murmur of the summer flow and stepping up his tempo when melting snows turned the Kicking Horse into a plunging flood that filled the narrow canyon with wind and thunder.

Up to now Char had taken the mountain river's more voluptuous phases in his stride, but there came a certain spring when the bull-throated roar of the tumbling water filled him with an uncontrollable urge to find adventure beyond the curtain of sound and fury.

For a while he managed to hold this disturbing restlessness in check but, finally, unable any longer to resist the insistent pull of distant places, he turned his back on the basin that had been his home for so long and surged into the froth-flecked current.

For a while he made fairly satisfactory progress, but he had either over-estimated his own strength or underestimated the force of the rapid, and sheer exhaustion finally forced him to abandon the main current and make his way along an off-shoot of the main stream.

At home familiarity with every nook and cranny of the rock-bottomed basin had reduced the possibilities of ambush and surprise to the minimum, but now, in his Marco Polo role, he kept

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blundering into difficulties that might easily have cost him his life.

Once, as he was working his way across the mouth of a shallow bay, intent on regaining fast water, a monstrous shadow blocked off the light of the sun and a diving eagle, as much a king in his own right as he was, missed his back by a hair's breadth. Another time he blundered into a poacher's net stretched artfully between the rocks and would undoubtedly have come to a sticky end if the netting had been just a little stronger. As it was, lengths of rotten twine trailed from his gills and tormented him for hours.

The most hazardous incident of the journey, however, was the time he rounded a sharp bend to see a big black bear straddling the narrow stream and scooping out fish with his paws. Though all his instincts, such as they were, warned him against trying to win past the obstruction, the restlessness that had been driving him for so long had the upper hand and he couldn't stop. Circling a small basin a couple of times to build up speed, he shot upstream.

To tell the truth, the bear was not much good as a fisherman and was missing a lot more small fish than he caught but, as luck would have it, just as the trout flashed past a black paw slapped down into the water, a set of curved talons hooked into his tender belly and he soared through the air to come down on a nearby boulder with a resounding slap.

Char was in a spot. Stunned by the fall, he flapped feebly on the rock and would have fallen an easy victim to the bear if that dusky fisherman hadn't been too astounded to move. Fortunately, he tumbled into the water before the bear could recover his wits. Weaving uncertainly to the bottom, he stuck his nose under a rock and remained there, lying low till the rocks had stopped pinwheeling about him.

Later, when the fire in his tortured belly had subsided to a dull throb, he nosed into the stream once more and kept on going till he emerged, one day, in a sizeable bush-fringed pool that, for some reason or another, appealed to his fancy.

A quick run through the rock-bottomed basin confirmed his first impressions. There were no rapids, at least he could neither see nor hear any, but everything else about the secluded spot reminded him of his old downriver home. By nightfall he had located the deep spots, the shallows at the inlet and, what was even more important, a safe hideout beneath a rocky ledge deep down under the far bank.

As far as he could tell he was alone in the pool except for a pair of northern loons at the deep end of the basin, and since he had nothing to fear from the gravel-voiced birds with the ice-pick bills, he paid them scant attention.

Free, now, of the driving restlessness that had been plaguing

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him for so long, he was feeding on stone larvæ in the inlet one day when he spotted a long dark shape drilling towards him through the depths. Taking it for granted that it was one of the loons, he shifted his position slightly and went on feeding. But when the swiftly moving object easily duplicated his move and kept coming right at him, he saw, to his consternation, that it wasn't a loon at all but an otter. Doing a quick back-flip, he swam furiously for the under-water ledge that he had been saving up for just such an emergency.

Baffled by the trout's disappearance, the otter nosed along the ledge and even explored the cavity with a nimble paw but, failing to locate his quarry, he finally churned away in disgust.

Although Char was elated at having eluded the brown-furred footpad so easily, certain experiences of the past told him that he could not possibly, in ordinary circumstances, match speed with an otter, and from that moment on he was constantly on the alert.

But at last, tiring of having to keep forever poised on one fin, as it were, ready to flick away at the least sign of danger, he had just decided to pull up stakes and find a place less cluttered up with otters when he discovered that something—old age probably—had slowed the otter down to such an extent that any danger of contact with him was more imaginary than real.

Strange as it may seem, the otter either wasn't aware of his curtailed power or, knowing it, still hoped to catch the big trout by surprise; he never failed to give chase the instant he spotted Char, and the water frequently seethed and frothed as the two churned through the depths in a wild hare and hounds chase that never decided anything.

Pete Dalgleish, the fire warden, was a busy man and stuck conscientiously to his job during the dry weather, but overcast skies and light showers invariably found him fishing the Kicking Horse with tireless enthusiasm.

Pushing through the woods one day he came on the big pool just as Char rolled lazily to the surface and slapped down a fly with his tail. Holding his breath, the warden watched the big trout gulp down his victim, then surge clear of the water in a great free-wheeling leap that seemed to give him wings.

Pete watched the trout fall back into the water with a tremendous splash, then turned to size up the pool with knowing eyes.

Catching that fish, the biggest trout he had ever seen, was going to be tough. To begin with, the trees crowded so close to the rocky banks that a cast from either shore was certainly out of the question. Then, to make matters more difficult, the pool was obviously too deep to wade in. Baffled by the trout's natural defences, Pete drew

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the branches aside and studied the inlet. A small stream flowed down the steep slope, and the mouth was studded with old grey boulders that had probably once decorated a mountain top.

Standing on these rocks a man should be able to make a fairly good cast, but Pete knew that the appearance of anything as big as a human outlined against the sky would send the wary trout high-tailing for the bottom. He was about to give up in disgust when a sudden thought sent him hurrying back into the woods.

Dark clouds were scudding across the heavens, and rain dripped from the trees when Pete appeared next day at the deep end of the pool with a twelve-foot canoe. Chuckling to himself at having worked out the only way the big fish could be bearded in his den, he eased the little craft into the water and backed into the woods to break out his tackle.

Setting up rod and line was an old story to the fire warden and, ordinarily, he could have done the job blindfolded, but now his hands trembled so at the deep surgings that came from the pool that he could hardly thread the line through the eyelets.

When the time came to select a fly that might appeal to the big trout he just could not decide and switched from one to another. Finally settling on a Parmachene Belle, he attached it to the end of his line, pulled the line taut, and gave the rod an experimental swish or two.

A moment later, taking particular care not to make any sound that might startle his quarry, he stepped into the canoe and, giving it a little push, let it drift quietly down the pool. Waiting till the little craft had lost its momentum, he dropped the fly in a little eddy close to the far bank.

The cast was perfect. The fly hit the water with that little bounce that tightens the heart-strings, then skittered seductively as Pete wiggled the tip.

Then something exploded in the pool, the Parmachene disappeared in a welter of foam and spray, the rod bent like a hoop, and the line smoked through the eyelets.

For all his skill, the fire warden was taken completely by surprise, and before he could do anything about setting the hook the line sagged limply in the water. Knowing exactly what had happened, he reeled in the silk with hardly a glance at the hookless leader.

Had Dalgleish been slightly less experienced he would, in all probability, have replaced the fly hurriedly and whipped the pool in a frenzy. Certain that the big fish was sporting the missing hook somewhere about his anatomy, he picked up his paddle and nosed the canoe ashore.

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The warden returned to the pool frequently after that—not to fish but to watch. Screened by the bushes, he would note the eddies, memorize the way the current swung out from the inlet and, since he had decided against further use of the canoe, search the banks for a possible foothold.

A spell of dry weather, fraught with danger, chained Pete Dalgleish to his tower for several days, but the first light shower found him on the left bank of the Kicking Horse pool with a short rod, an assortment of dry flies and a grim determination to land the big trout if it was the last thing he ever did. Breaking off the smaller branches to give himself all possible room, he tied a Number Fourteen Mickey Finn to a thread-fine gut-cast, dipped the lure in oil then flicked it deftly into the current.

Char, who, by this time, had rid himself of the Parmachene Belle, spotted the fly at once. Emerging from his hide-out under the ledge, he swept about it in a wide circle then, satisfied as to its genuineness, was about to make a rush for it when the long, narrow shape of the otter flashed between him and the succulent titbit. All thought of food forgotten, he darted off at an angle, then shot away with the otter, as usual, in hot pursuit.

For a moment the fire warden was too astonished to do more than follow the frothing wakes of fish and otter with bulging eyes, then, reeling in his line, he turned and pushed his way through the bush.

Back in the tower he had plenty of time in which to cogitate on the big fish and his strange companion. Grinning wryly to himself at the thought of what his friends would say if he ever mentioned that he had seen an otter virtually creating a diversion for a trout just as the latter was about to take his fly, he finally decided that if he ever hoped to capture the trout he would, first, have to render the otter temporarily *hors-de combat*.

Having decided to embark on this somewhat unorthodox scheme, Pete lost no time getting down to work, and during the next wet spell spent long hours looking for signs of otter about the pool.

As far as he could discover, the animal didn't live in the big basin but had a den in the bank of some nearby creek and only visited the pool for food.

Wise in the ways of fur-bearers, and familiar with an otter's love for routine, the warden went over the surroundings like a sleuth till he finally located the exact spot where the animal habitually entered the pool—a shallow channel between two small boulders. There could be no mistaking the trail. Nothing showed on the rocks, of course, but his paw-marks and tail-drag were plainly visible in the mud.

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Having no wish to injure the otter, but merely to remove him from the scene while he tackled the trout, Pete bound thick layers of cotton about the jaws of a number three steel trap and set it between the rocks and just under the surface of the water. Covering the set with soggy leaf-mould, he drove a stake through the chain-ring and, retiring to the woods, settled himself comfortably against a tree where he had an uninterrupted view of the inlet.

For the best part of an hour, perhaps, nothing disturbed the stillness but the muted tinkle of the brook at the inlet and the wild laughter of a loon.

Then something rustled in the underbrush, and the otter's long, weasel-like neck rose above the weeds. Pete couldn't see the main part of the pool but he could have sworn that the animal was actually looking for the trout.

For a moment the smooth, whiskered head swivelled this way and that, then the animal disappeared from view without a sound, to reappear shortly on the rocks at the inlet. Clambering awkwardly over the boulders, he slipped into the channel, but just as he was about to surge over the trap the trout came to the surface with an explosive whoosh that sent the startled otter rearing back on his haunches.

There was a muffled sound as the jaws of the traps closed on water, and the next instant otter and fish were in the pool and churning the water in a wild, hare and hound chase.

Pete Dalgleish stared at the bubbles bursting on the surface as if he couldn't believe what he had just seen; then, giving his head a puzzled shake, he turned and melted into the woods. When otters rushed to the defence of trout, and trout played the role of lookout for otters, it was time for sensible men to quit fishing.

* * *

EXIT LINE

Hilaire Belloc was asked to give the principal address at an important banquet, and he had to sit for a long time through far too many preliminary speeches. Finally he was called upon. Amidst thunderous applause he rose and said: "I have been asked to give my address. It is King's Land, Shipley. I should have been there an hour ago, and I am going there immediately. Goodnight."

HARVEY GRAHAM, *A Doctor's London*

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LAST CALL

"Why are you being so stubborn, my friend?" he asked

by NUGENT BARKER

NURSE BAILEY felt the doctor's pulse; then she listened to his heart; finally, she held a mirror to his lips.

"Not a breath."

Even doctors breathe their last—said the late Dr. Wilks, smiling at her from the pillow.—If your round, baby eyes had been older, my dear, and you yourself younger, upon my soul, I might have suffered a twinge of regret at not being able to kiss the glass that has mirrored your face so many hundreds of times. . . . No answer. Yes, I'm dead, it seems. How very interesting!

He watched her podgy fingers as they returned the mirror to her vanity bag. Snap. Poor Dr. Wilks. All over now.

The room was still with sunlight.

The little nurse closed the doctor's eyes, switched on the bedside lamp, and stared through the four tall windows into bright July weather.

Rousing herself, she went her dutiful round of the thick, richly brocaded curtains. The gardener's broom lay idle at the grassy foot of the birch tree. The ticking of the bedside clock grew louder. Then Nurse Bailey rustled to the door, and stood decorously on one side.

"You can come in now, sir."

Thank you, Ann.

"I shall telephone to Dr. D'Arcy."

Just as you like. I am very grateful for all you have done—he added.

His plump and dapper figure surveyed the rose-red room with the eyes of the connoisseur. He smiled at the curtains drawn against the sun. He nodded at the death-bed lamp shedding its rich, secret glow. Here was life perfected! The room had scarcely altered since he called on Mrs. Wilks. Here was the white-enamelled bed as he remembered it, with its gilded wicker panel at the foot. There was poetry in the very fact that the enamel had reached the colour of old wax.

Hullo!—said Dr. Wilks, sitting up.

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And how are we today ?—smiled the visitor, placing his hands on his plump knees.

Nurse Bailey's mirror says I'm dead. It's Mr. de Ath, I believe ?—said Dr. Wilks.

By all means, if you wish it so,—replied the other,—though, for my own part, I prefer to call a spade a spade ;—and here, by a dexterous movement, he whipped off his gold-rimmed eye-glasses, and polished them vigorously with a dark-blue, white-spotted handkerchief.—That's my favourite joke !

But I know Nurse Bailey, poor dear. She is a trifle slovenly in regard to the exact sciences. I had better make sure about you,—added Mr. de Ath, reaching for the doctor's pulse. Ye—e—s. Um ? Open your mouth, doctor. A leedle wider. Wider. Thanks. Say ah.

Ah !—said Dr. Wilks.—Ninety-nine.

M'm—thank you, yes. You are ready to come along with me, I really do believe.

Are you not sure ?—demanded Dr. Wilks.

In days gone by,—said Mr. de Ath,—I was much too certain of myself. Through ghostly aeons I worked alone, with all my life in front of me ; and I cannot count the number of journeys that I made to the world, only to be turned away by the flutter of an eye-lid. People—he continued, after a brief pause—have always appeared to me more living when they are dead than when they are alive ; that was my great difficulty ; then, in the course of the centuries, I discovered that the livelier a person is to me, the deader he is to the doctors ; but what a struggle it has been, fixing a standard for that liveliness !

You seem a little misty in my eyes,—said Dr. Wilks hopefully ;—a trifle blurred.

Surely, doctor,—said Mr. de Ath,—you have not forgotten so soon the familiar glaze—and here he peered into the dancing eyes of Dr. Wilks.—In my opinion you have indeed attained the degree of excellence !

In your opinion ! Why should I be satisfied with that ? Might I suggest, Mr. de Ath (as one professional man to another) that we call in a second opinion ?

As regards your suggestion,—smiled Mr. de Ath, tweaking the lapels of his coat,—let me remind you, my dear doctor, that none but I can judge a person's fitness for arrival into my world.

My proposition—replied Dr. Wilks, with a touch of severity—related to the question as to whether I am ready to *depart* from mine.

That is our difficulty,—said Mr. de Ath, reflectively,—and I cannot see how it may be surmounted. Neither, I feel certain, can you. I applaud your suggestion ; yet, surely, Dr. Wilks, you must

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admit that no leech on earth would willingly call in a second opinion to determine whether his patient is dead. I am positive that Dr. D'Arcy—who had your case in hand, I believe—would never consent to such a course. Besides, who is to put the question to him? Not you, of a certainty, and not I: not you, for the very good reason that you would have to be alive to tell him your wish; not I, because he would have to be dead in order to hear and see me.

It is a difficult situation—mused Dr. Wilks.

Let us say, rather, that *you* are a very difficult situation—corrected Mr. de Ath.—Really, Monsieur, you are being most stubborn. Bless my soul, I never had any difficulty with your own patients, Dr. Wilks!

You forget, Mr. de Ath, that Bailey has never worked with me in any of my cases.

I have not forgotten it; but I hold to my opinion regarding the nurse's mirror: you are no more substantial than an image in a glass.

He paused, patted his chubby fingers several times on the rose-coloured quilt, and continued:—Come, come! As a man of substance, I cannot see why this should be so disappointing to you, Dr. Wilks! Consider what you gain! Having come so far, why throw away an opportunity to see forgotten faces, to hear remembered voices?

The doctor, who was still in the prime of middle age—a period when the slightest readjustment of thought will send a man roaring back into his twenties, or sobbing forward into the shadows—remained silent. In desperate cases, he had never hesitated to deal with the moment, regardless of his patient's past history and the problematical future. What did this moment hold for Dr. Wilks? A vision of his wife, sweet soul, as she lay in this very bed, racked with unbearable pain; and as she was now, waiting for him in peace. Without a doubt, she, too, had argued right and left with Mr. de Ath, and in the ecstasy of her relief from pain she had danced in this very room before she went to heaven. Whereupon, throwing off the bedclothes, Dr. Wilks began to dance away like mad.

Leaping to the wardrobe, he took out his hat, and clapped it rakishly on his head; then, seizing his stethoscope, plugging it into his ears, and listening to imaginary chests in mid-air Dr. Wilks continued to kick away to his heart's content.

I protest!—cried Mr. de Ath.—Surely you are not going to continue to dance with your pyjamas on, Dr. Wilks?

My doctor's modesty forbids me to dance naked, especially in front of *you*, sir!

Sapristi!—exclaimed Mr. de Ath, breaking into Spanish, which he had picked up in Spain—it is certainly a *danse macabre!*—Whereupon he polished his eye-glasses vigorously, and put them on again

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as quickly as possible.—I remember when I attended the Maccabee brothers—upon my soul, I thought they would never stop dancing! For hours they held up the world! And Mrs. Wilks, also,—he continued after a pause, dropping his voice, and watching the doctor with a tender eye,—I thought she would never cease tripping about in her Paris hat, *la belle dame!*

For the life of me,—cried Dr. Wilks, dropping his stethoscope on to the floor, and footing it neatly between the earpieces,—I cannot see the sense in going along with you, when this is dead enough for me! My weeks of pain are dead and buried! Look—I could cross continents! I have not even lost my breath!

You have no breath to lose,—smiled Mr. de Ath.

So much the better,—said Dr. Wilks; and he gathered speed, preparing to dance on for ever.

Dear me! Dear me!—exclaimed Mr. de Ath—and here he rubbed his plump palms together, in order to hide his irritation—it is scarcely seemly that you and I should be fighting against each other, doctor!

Excuse me,—answered Dr. Wilks,—but surely it is a doctor's duty to fight against death?

Do you fight against birth?—cried Mr. de Ath.—Upon my soul, you dote on him! Yes, you dote on him; yet why? I have never been able to understand your excessive fondness for my opposite number. Is he not responsible for all the troubles in the world?—whereas I take them away; or at any rate, I take away a great many of them.

Dr. Wilks hung his hat in the wardrobe, sat on the edge of the bed, and stared into Mr. de Ath's spectacles.

We fear you sometimes. Even the initial of your name reminds us that you reduce all men to dust, and dust looks the same, whoever it was. Your name, in short, is immutable; and that alone gives it a great dignity. On the contrary, every time birth comes to life, we name him to our fancy. . . . It is sometimes a great pity—murmured Cuthbert Wilks—that he is never spry enough to be consulted.

Yes!—rejoined Mr. de Ath,—and then they get the law to fix it on you!

The doctor bounded to his feet, wincing at the sudden movement.

The very word!—he shouted—and here the gleam, the twinkle, the merest spark that for some time past had flecked the doctor's eye, expanded to a glow.—Neither he nor you, my dear de Ath, can disregard the Law! A man is not dead until he is *legally* dead: and here I remain, body and soul, until Dr. D'Arcy has signed the certificate!

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On uttering these words, he planted himself a trifle breathlessly in the middle of the room.

Tcha! A mere formality, senhor!—exclaimed Mr. de Ath with the utmost irritation; whereupon he began to pace the floor.—Frenchmen, Spaniards, Portuguese, you are all the same to me! Am I not the final word of the Law of Nature? When have the bushmen kept registers of their dead? Did I not make life itself intrinsically reasonable from that moment when I called on Mr. Abel?

It is a far cry from Abel to Wilks!—retorted the latter.—A lot has happened in the interval!

Nothing has happened, as far as I am concerned. I never deal with the living. You are all the same dead man.

Speak up,—said Dr. Wilks.

What do I care,—continued Mr. de Ath,—whether the population dies off within reach of its doctors and lawyers, or in desert places? *Donnerwetter!*—he added, breaking into German, which he had picked up in Whitehall—I get you all in the end!

Very well, then. You can wait for D'Arcy's signature, while I continue dancing!—Here the doctor jerked and stumbled at a sudden grip of pain.

Mr. de Ath, who had put his hand to his ear in order to hear the better, hesitated, and proceeded:—There have been occasions when I have *wanted* to release a man from unbearable agony before his time was up, doctor—yes, there have been multitudes; but in that capacity I am powerless. I can pull no one into my world; but must wait for life itself to send him when it thinks he ought to go. Was not this the mercy that it showed to Mrs. Wilks?

Louder,—called Dr. Wilks, making an effort to dance.

I can influence a man to this extent,—continued Mr. de Ath, raising his voice:—I can make myself seductive to him.

You are far from seducing me!—cried Dr. Wilks, recoiling.

What did you say?—asked Mr. de Ath, putting his hand again to his ear.—Why are you being so stubborn, my friend? *Why go back to your pain?*

I can hardly hear you—ah, nor see you!—exclaimed Dr. Wilks, in alarm. And drawing nearer, he stared at Mr. de Ath.

I wish you'd speak a little louder, shouted de Ath from afar.

Fear seized the doctor then; fear, and inspiration, while the sweat of agony dripped from his body.—It is a doctor's duty to save life, not to save death,—he burst out, digging his knuckles into his belly;—but to save the life of death—that is another matter!

He washed his hands beneath the running tap, and prepared a syringe, in a panic. He sterilized the tube, he measured out the drops with infinite care . . . and when he turned at last from the cupboard of drugs, he held a lethal weapon, poised and ready. Nurse Bailey

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would have done otherwise. She would have given him a vital injection to pull him through the rapidly approaching crisis, something to keep him fully alive, in agony, if only for a few days longer. Here he looked across the room, and saw no more than a misty presence, a thickening of the air where de Ath had stood. The clock was thumping in the silence; then, baring his own firm, quivering thigh, the doctor pinched the flesh, and slowly pushed the needle into it.

To banish pain is a doctor's duty; it eases for good the patient's mind; in addition, it brings great happiness to the doctor; and after all, there was only himself to think of—no other—only himself, only Cuthbert Wilks.

The syringe had scarcely fallen to the ground when Wilks was aware of the slowing of his heart and of the passing of pain. He danced a little, stepping warily amongst the splinters of glass.

I remember—said Mr. de Ath, returning his handkerchief to his pocket—calling on Mr. Shakespeare. A most modern man! Of course, I was wearing other clothes than these. I remember his first words as we flew away. "A swan-like end," he whispered, holding my hand, peering down at the clouds. "A swan-like end, fading in music." A quotation, let me remind you—from himself. Whom else was there to quote from, all those years ago?

But Cuthbert Wilks was not listening. "What fools we mortals were!" he decided, gazing triumphantly at Mr. de Ath, who was even now achieving the full solidity of Death. "Take me!" he cried, in exultation. "I succumb! I succumb! Receive thou! Receive thou! Receive thou!" Then, holding both his sides, as though in laughter, and looking upwards, he thrust himself forward.

"*Recipe! . . . Recipe!*"

When Nurse Bailey came back into the room, she hid herself behind one of the heavy, brocaded curtains, and stared through the open window into bright July weather. Nothing moved in the garden below; but beyond the far hedge a flock of birds was flying, and she could trace the shadow mounting the field to the skyline more precisely than she could follow the flock itself, which, to her eyes at that moment, appeared nebulous against the blue. The farther away it flew, the more it melted into the sunlight; and presently it merged into the sound of the doctor's car turning the bends.

Comforted by the plump and dapper figure of Dr. D'Arcy that now took possession of her mind, the little nurse came back into the room and settled herself as primly as possible in the bedside chair. Glancing down at the quiet face on the pillow, she was glad that the

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lidded eyes would never know that she was crying, making her face hideous.

"How splendid," she thought, dazed with a kind of female ecstasy, "how splendid a partner I have been! How well we have worked this out together, Dr. D'Arcy, you and I!" And for the hundredth time she went over his words that had given her the hint of what she should do.

"If the touch of the finger-tips on the wrist is not sufficiently delicate, and the ear not sensitive enough to catch the beating of the heart, there is always your little mirror, my dear, when human senses fail."

Of course, he hadn't put it in exactly those words. But was there not a hint to her, conveyed in the not quite remembered words that he had actually used? She heard his car, at this very moment, swerving off from the village; soon there would come the crunch of the wheels in the drive, the ring of the bell, the creak of the baize-covered door from the kitchen, the barking of the dog in the hall.

There was something else that Dr. D'Arcy had said, and she linked it up with the other.

"You'd let a patient die, I really do believe, when perhaps a shot of something underneath the skin, at the proper moment—but there," he had added, snatching off his glasses in his dear, familiar way, polishing them vigorously with his beautiful, white-spotted handkerchief, and quizzing her with his bright blue eyes, "it *all* depends on what your *mirror* says!"

She heard the barking of the dog.

It all depends on what the mirror says. . . . "I had better save our consciences, my dear," she whispered, smiling.

Taking her mirror out of her vanity-bag, Nurse Bailey wetted a corner of her apron with her ugly little mouth, and wiped off the waxy preparation—the stuff that she was in the habit of rubbing on the surface of the glass, to keep it from clouding.

* * *

OUT OF THE WOOD

A young lieutenant recently returned from two and a half years' service in Malaya, where he earned the M.C., was asked to address the Cambridge Rotary Club.

Referring to his experiences after arriving back in this country, he said the authorities insisted he should go on a jungle warfare course.

On Salisbury Plain he found himself mainly occupied with a series of "Jewts": Jungle exercise without trees.

PETERBOROUGH, in *The Daily Telegraph*

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SALAD DAYS

Unthinking, idle, wild and young,
I laugh'd and danc'd and talk'd and sung

PRINCESS AMELIA, *daughter of George III*

I can remember, as if it happened last week, more than half a century ago, when I must have been about four and, on fine summer mornings, would sit in a field adjoining the house. What gave me delight then was a mysterious notion, for which I could certainly not have found words, of a Treasure. It was waiting for me either in the earth, just below the buttercups and daisies, or in the golden air. I had formed no idea of what this Treasure would consist of, and nobody had ever talked to me about it. But morning after morning would be radiant with its promise. Somewhere, not far out of reach, it was waiting for me, and at any moment I might roll over and put a hand on it. I suspect now that the Treasure was Earth itself and the light and warmth of the sunbeams; yet sometimes I fancy that I have been searching for it ever since. J. B. PRIESTLEY, *Delight*

Infant Mortality

The Grizzly Bear is huge and wild;
He has devoured the infant child.
The infant child is not aware
He has been eaten by the bear.

A. E. HOUSMAN

Débutante

The following May I came out again, this time to embark on an entire season. Did I enjoy it? Did I have fine weather, you might as well ask . . . There were many days—iridescent days—when "living seemed a laugh" and, looking through a golden haze, I saw only what I wanted to see. At such times the mere pursuit of enjoyment was in itself enough to give me a lovely, almost votive feeling. By just dancing myself dizzy, looking as nice as I could, or exploring myself anew through some fresh pair of eyes, I felt I was furthering some momentous, indeed, some almost devout purpose. And at other times, probably simply because I was overtired, the whole business—and my goodness, what a business it was!—would suddenly appear futile beyond words.

What *do* I remember of that first season? . . . What random "flash-backs" come? . . . What do I see . . . ?

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I see striped awnings, linkmen with flaring torches; powdered, liveried footmen; soaring marble staircases; tiaras, smiling hostesses; azaleas in gilt baskets; white waistcoats, violins, elbows sawing the air, names on pasteboard cards, quails in aspic, macédoine, strawberries and cream, tired faces of cloakroom attendants, washed streets in blue dawns, sparrows pecking about the empty pavements, my bedroom curtains being drawn apart to let in the late morning light; a breakfast tray approaching my bedside; bandboxes, tissue paper . . .

THE LADY CYNTHIA ASQUITH, *Remember and Be Glad*

Age of Innocence

I suppose that plumbers' children know more about plumbing than plumbers do, and welders' children more about welding than welders,
Because the only fact in an implausible world is that all young know better than their elders.
A young person is a person with nothing to learn,
One who already knows that ice does not chill and fire does not burn.
It knows that it can read indefinitely in the dark and do its eyes no harm,
It knows it can climb on the back of a thin chair to look for a sweater it left on the bus without falling and breaking an arm.
It knows it can spend six hours in the sun on its first day at the beach without ending up a skinless beet,
And it knows it can walk barefoot through the barn without running a nail in its feet.
It knows it doesn't need a raincoat if it's raining or galoshes if it's snowing,
And knows how to manage a boat without ever having done any sailing or rowing.
It knows after every sporting contest that it had really picked the winner,
And that its appetite is not affected by eating three chocolate bars covered with peanut butter and guava jelly, fifteen minutes before dinner.
Most of all it knows
That only other people catch colds through sitting around in draughts in wet clothes.
Meanwhile psychologists grow rich
Writing that the young are ones parents should not undermine the self-confidence of which.

OGDEN NASH

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Self-Taught

When six years old Benjamin Disraeli went to school at Islington, thence to a school at Blackheath kept by a nonconformist parson, where he showed no inclination for communal exercises but maintained his popularity by telling stories. The games he played were for his own pleasure, such as driving two boys with string reins as if they were horses, firing at passers-by with a pea-shooter from the top of a coach, and, during the holidays, forming a parliament with his brothers and friends, in which he was permanent Prime Minister and no one else ever came to power.

HESKETH PEARSON, *Dizzy*

Long Thoughts

When I was but thirteen or so
I went into a golden land,
Chimborazo, Cotopaxi
Took me by the hand . . .

I walked in a great golden dream
To and fro from school—
Shining Popocatapetl
The dusty streets did rule.

I walked home with a gold dark boy
And never a word I'd say,
Chimborazo, Cotopaxi
Had taken my speech away ;

I gazed entranced upon his face
Fairer than any flower—
O shining Popocatapetl
It was thy magic hour :

The houses, people, traffic seemed
Thin fading dreams by day.
Chimborazo, Cotopaxi
They had stolen my soul away !

W. J. TURNER

Uneconomic

Youth is a wonderful thing ; what a crime to waste it on children.

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW .

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MASQUERADE

So much richness, laughter, enchantment—and only one more night

by ANTHONY THORNE

YOUR last night in Venice—how would you spend it? What would you do when you knew that all this would soon be over, that this magic of slow black gondolas and tilted pink palaces, of water and mysterious shadow and sleeping domes would soon be nothing but a memory, and the lovely gentle rhythm of the place exchanged for the rush and roar and ordinariness of a homeward-bound train?

It was difficult enough, Michael knew, to decide what to do on *any* night in Venice—whether to sit at a café in the Piazzetta and stare at the delicate tracery, the lace in stone, of the Doge's Palace; or wait for the moon to turn the sloping lines of Santa Maria into a silver cascade; or watch the young girls flirting with brown, white-suited sailors as they came ashore from the flood-lit Italian cruiser; or count, across the Lagoon, the close-threaded diamonds of the Lido. Or revisit his own favourite bits and corners, the forgotten bridge, the un-famed statue that seemed to be his special discovery. Or just to wander—listening, looking, enjoying equally the brilliant displays in the expensive shops under the colonnade and the more homely sight of children straddling the old red marble lions, squabbling shrilly for the next ride . . .

So much richness, laughter, enchantment—and now only one more night of it! What would he do? Where could he find the heart of this heart-shaped city?

"If your coffee is cold," Maria reminded him, "it will not be because I did not make it hot."

Her voice startled him, he had forgotten her gentle familiar presence in the little room. She looked at him and smiled—dark twinkling eyes, black browed, and smooth silver hair.

"I'm sorry, Maria," he answered her in the soft Venetian he had learnt here in his boyhood. "I was thinking—"

"Of London already? Do you really have to go back to-morrow?"

"I must—I shouldn't have stayed so long. But there were all

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Zia Caterina's affairs to settle. And then—well, you know how I always loved Venice."

"Zia Caterina" was Aunt Catherine, who many years ago had startled the family by marrying an Italian Count, and had almost enraged them by being completely and unsensationally happy. In spite of their dire prophecies before she left England he really was a Count, the little palace in Venice did exist, that waving black hair was equally real, he neither ill-treated nor deceived her, and they were even moderately well-off! There were indeed only two sadnesses in Zia Caterina's life—the fact that she had no children, though the frequent visits of young Michael, her nephew, had helped her to forget this—and the fact that her husband died early in middle age, carried off by one of the strange maladies fostered by the tricky Venetian climate.

And so it was to Michael that Zia Caterina, in her turn, had left everything—the tumbledown little house on a side canal that had the cheek to call itself a *Palazzo,* and a useful sum of money in the *Banca d'Italia.* Last but not least he had inherited two faithful old retainers, Maria and her gondolier husband, Angelo.

Maria was saying, just as though she had followed his thoughts back to boyhood:

"You used to say you wanted to live in Venice forever."

Michael laughed. Abandoning his cold coffee he lit a cigarette and wandered over to the balcony window.

"But that would be like drinking old brandy after every meal of one's life."

"Well, why not?" said Maria, laughing too. "I wouldn't say no to that. Would you, Angelo?"

For Angelo had come into the room, his wide straw hat in his hand, to ask as he always did at this time of evening if he could take the *Signore* over to the *Traghetto Trinità.* That was Angelo's gondola-station, and it was from there that he always plied his trade.

"As usual, *Signore*?"

Now he would have to decide. An order must be given. And all he knew, at the moment, was that the evening must not on any account be "as usual"—he must do something enterprising, something absurd, something even a little mad.

Angelo had noticed his hesitation and had understood it. Angelo never needed to be told.

"But no! The *Signore* will wish to do something . . . a little fantastic . . . on his last night. What a pity the Carnival is over!"

Michael turned and faced him suddenly. Their eyes were on a level, they were of the same height. And as he realised this, he

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knew the answer. Knew it with such a shock of excitement that he nearly burst out laughing. He said impulsively:

"I'm going to take your place, Angelo. Just for tonight."

A startled pause. But people who have known you for a long time never take you seriously, and Maria chuckled.

"You—a gondolier!"

"Why not?" Michael went up to Angelo, measuring the spare, wiry figure that could have belonged to a man much younger, a man of his own age. "Why shouldn't Michael be Angelo? After all—the names go well together!" They both laughed now, but they were beginning to realize that he was in earnest. "All I need is a pair of blue serge trousers and one of your white jackets."

"And a straw hat?"

"No!" said Michael hastily. Those broad straw hats with pink ribbons dangling down the back . . . no, for an Englishman there were limits! "I'll go bareheaded, as so many of you do in the evenings. Come on, now. What are we waiting for?"

When he went with Angelo into the servants' quarters he could still hear Maria laughing as she cleared away his supper plates. The blue serge trousers were rough and thick, the deep-collared white jacket nearly strangled him. One false move and you broke your neck: once in it, you would never get out.

"Why are you doing this, *Signore*"?

Michael emerged gasping, and brushed his loose black hair away from his eyes. He said, smiling:

"Because I want the whole of Venice tonight, Angelo. I want the heart of it—the cream of it—the scent of it!"

Angelo wrinkled his sunburnt nose.

"The scent of it!"

"Oh, I know perfectly well which corners to avoid—especially with charming lady passengers!"

"They say there's an American film star," said Angelo helpfully, "staying at the *Danieli*. And a beautiful Argentine heiress has just taken a lease of the *Palazzo Dandolo*—"

"I shan't deprive you of them, Angelo. No, they're not quite what I'm looking for."

"What are you looking for, then?"

Michael hesitated, then said quietly:

"You told me, didn't you, that as a gondolier you learned more about human nature than almost anyone else?"

"Yes, *Signore*."

"And that—as a gondolier—you were the happiest man alive?"

"Yes, *Signore*."

"Well, then—I think that argues very well for human nature!"

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"He only says he's the happiest man alive," said Maria, appearing with her tray, "because he married *me*. And if he said anything else there'd be trouble." She looked at Michael amusedly and ran her eye over him. "Not bad. Not bad at all. In fact—I think they'll keep you busy tonight. And that the other gondoliers will be extremely jealous."

"But they all know him," said Angelo. "Gino and Armando and Beppo and Antonio—they will enjoy the joke."

The joke? Yes, it was a joke in a sense—like being suddenly allowed to "walk on" in a play. But what sort of a play was this going to be? Comedy, or tragi-comedy? Or a romance? Or a little of each?

Angelo went down with him to the water-kissed steps, green and worn. The gondola was there, its thin fine shape like a lyric. And Angelo hesitated. He said with diffidence:

"*Signore*, there is a difficulty."

"A difficulty? Good heavens, Angelo, you know I'll bring you far more than I've earned."

"It isn't that." Angelo looked down at his gondola, and there was evidently so much more in his mind than he could say.

"It's *very* difficult, this difficulty. You see, *Signore*, you speak Venetian well, and you know how to manage a boat. And you know the canals. But being a gondolier—that is so much more than any of these things. There is tact, there is understanding—there are many things of the heart that you will need. Stories to tell that I could have told you, some that I have told you and you may have forgotten. But there—perhaps you will know when to speak and when to be silent, although you are a young man." Angelo, of course, always knew. He looked away, and his brown wrinkled face flashed suddenly into a wicked white smile. "And there are tricks, too, which I should have taught you."

"Tricks?"

Angelo giggled.

"It is possible, you know, when turning a corner—ohé—o!—to fling a man and a girl into one another's arms just at the right moment—and without appearing to notice—by the way you manage the gondola. And equally, of course, to separate two who do not seem quite happy in one another's company. One movement of your wrist—and so much can be done! But these are things you learn in a lifetime. Tricks. Ah, yes—but the knowledge of when to use them—that is one of the many things one needs, to be a gondolier."

Blue shadows were creeping into the rose and green of the little canal. And blue shadows, the excitement of evening in Venice, the thought of mirrored stars and dreaming windows, the faint sounds

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of music from a palace, the broad happy laughter of the Rialto market—all these things were drawing Michael and his borrowed gondola away from the steps, out into the wider waters of the Grand Canal, over to the *Traghetto Trinità* and the passing, chattering crowds. "*Gondola, gondola! Signori—gondola?*"

"Good-bye, Angelo."

"*Arrivederci.*" Michael was not quite sure if this were addressed to him or to the gondola itself. "Anyhow, *Signore*, I shall at last have an evening with Maria!"

Out into the Grand Canal with you, Michael, standing on the stern, thrusting forward with the oar. Don't bungle this, in your excitement. Out into the Canal, with the rest. Slowly, slowly, take your time. Rhythm. Not the rhythm of modern life at all, the life to which you're accustomed, the life of London, but a slower rhythm, the rhythm of the Canal—and of the heart.

The old pink palaces were floating too, and the Rialto Bridge danced over him. A motor-boat swooshed by and the gondola bucked sensitively, like a horse.

"*O— strega!*" somebody shouted in surprise.

That must be Antonio. Yes! Michael waved back and nearly overbalanced. Very soon the news would go round. All the gondoliers would laugh—a joke for them, the young *inglése*!

It was nearly dark already and the cafés of the Piazzetta were scattering many-coloured jewels in the water. Close by was the gondola-station, dark with wooden posts. He would soon be calling out to passers-by, offering them evening hours on the water. And if they only knew it, the hours of his last evening.

Eagerly he leant on the oar, bowed in an attitude that suggested almost a submission to the goddess of Chance.

It was disappointing at first—inevitably. Like drinking cold water from a Venetian champagne glass.

To start with, the other gondoliers of the station were in no mood for this sort of joke—the tourists, obviously frightened of the high prices, had stared longingly at the gondolas and hastened away from temptation. There would be little trade tonight for any of them. And the young Englishman—the Michael turned Angelo—if they had not already known and liked him, they would have been ready to wring his neck . . .

Michael, holding back his cry of "Gondola, gondola!" was relieved when they were engaged at last, one by a monumental French opera singer who demanded to be taken to the Lido and back in an hour, and another by quarrelling business men who were shaking their fists in one another's faces.

The place suddenly belonged to Michael. Then what stopped

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him from calling "gondola, gondola" at once? A face, among the many blurred faces of passers-by, like an unexpected flower in a hedge, turned to him, smiled, and was gone. It had been an unmistakably English face, the face of a young girl, a student perhaps. Yes, there had been books under her lightly tanned arm, she had worn a crisp print dress and no hat. One look, a smile, a second's hesitation—and would she ever come back? He found his voice quickly.

"Gondola, gondola!"

A client at once, but the wrong one. An Italian woman of the aristocracy whose own gondolier must be indisposed, and who had been forced to hire one from the *traghetto*. She sat and turned her head from him, but he had seen that she was extremely beautiful. Her elegant clothes were from Rome, her scent from Paris. She said nothing to him beyond giving him the address of her palace, and when they arrived she gave him his exact fare and no more. Flunkeys opened the doors for her, she disappeared, he was free again. He stuffed the notes into his pocket and turned back.

Even before he reached the *traghetto* he could see that the English girl had returned to it. She was leaning against a wall now, relaxed and quite unconscious of the lovely swing of her figure, still clasping her books and staring out at the Lagoon.

This time it was Michael who smiled first.

"Gondola—*Signorina*?"

She hesitated, her lips parted a little as though she were going to speak. She looked at him almost ruefully. Then — unlike the Italians, who just move a finger to say "no"—she shook her head. But he had a distinct impression that this was by no means final . . .

He found himself suddenly engaged by a couple of Americans—the evening was warming up!—and turned away. One of the Americans spoke a little Italian.

"Tell him, bud," said the other, "that I gotta boat bigger than his. A yacht—a whale of a yacht. Tell the guy in Italian."

A little ashamed, his friend translated the boastful speech, and Michael pretended to be impressed. They were only going to another hotel, another bar . . . They both shook him warmly by the hand and paid him far too lavishly. They could easily have walked there.

Back to the *traghetto*. It was night now. You could feel the night, you could smell it, you could hear it. Music from the Piazza. A serenade, too, out on the Lagoon—a lantern-hung raft. The night was waiting, hesitating . . .

But when the girl strolled back past the landing stage, Michael did not hesitate any longer.

"*Signorina!*"

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With a sweeping Italian gesture he indicated the empty gondola—and stretched out his other hand for her books. Yes! She had at last made up her mind. With a sigh of surrender she stepped down into the boat, and Michael could have sworn that, liking her at once, it gave a stir of pleasure. She had a delicious air of surprise, as though she found herself in a dream. Her wide grey eyes were more luminous than he had thought—the lashes darkened them deceptively—and now they were dancing with the boat, with the water, with the lights, with Venice itself.

But then she turned to him with a sudden change of mood, apprehensive, feeling for the bag that dangled from her wrist.

"Please tell me first," she said, "how much it will cost."

"A thousand *lire* an hour, *Signorina*. Fifteen hundred after sundown."

"As much as that! Yes, I was afraid it would be." She spoke a careful student-Italian with a strong English accent. "Venice must be the most expensive place in Europe. But how lovely it is!"

"Shall we pretend," said Michael, casting off as quickly as he could, "that it isn't yet sundown?"

"We can hardly do that, can we?" She laughed, turning her eyes to the rising moon. "But never mind, I'll be extravagant. I *had* to take a gondola, I couldn't resist it. It would have been silly not to—especially on a night like this."

"Yes," said Michael-Angelo, "especially on a night like this. Where do you wish to go, *Signorina*?"

They were floating away from the crowds. The moon over the water ran a silver ladder down to her.

"Go? Oh—anywhere." Then, glancing mischievously up at him, over her shoulder: "Or will that be even more expensive than going to a definite place?" Then she turned and looked directly at him, resting her arms on the black plush chair-back. "I know—take me to the places you're fond of. Not the tourist Venice, but the real Venice, the secret Venice. You'll know where to go. After all—you're a Venetian."

"*Si, Signorina*," said Michael guiltily. He felt appallingly tongue-tied. It was disturbing enough that she was in his gondola—and now, miraculously, he was to be allowed to take her just where he wanted, to show her all the small, delicious things of back-stage Venice that meant even more to him than its brighter glories. That delicate little bridge over a remote canal, that Madonna in a niche, that carved doorway that all the guide-books had forgotten . . . He nearly collided with another gondola, muttered under his breath, and had to take his eyes from hers. Then he said:

"You speak Italian very well, *Signorina*."

What a thumping banality! But at the moment he could think

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of nothing else to say, and he wanted to know more of her.

"I try. You see, I'm a university student and I come to Italy during vacations, to learn the language." (Of course, yes—there had been a grammar among those guide-books of hers). "But I haven't learnt much this time, except what it feels like to be in Venice—and in a gondola—"

"It took you a long time to make up your mind about that!"

"Well, it wasn't easy, deciding what to do."

"I don't understand."

"Your last night in Venice," she said, "how would you spend it? But of course, that's something you wouldn't understand—you belong here."

Michael was silent, shaken by the unintentional irony of it, and unwilling to lie to her. He said at last, trailing his oar and going down on one knee behind her, in the traditional pose of gondoliers who have something to whisper:

"Did you notice that little bridge, *Signorina*?"

"Yes," she smiled, "yes indeed I noticed it."

"One night," he told her, remembering one of Angelo's stories, "a man on that bridge was stopped from committing suicide by a beautiful face. He had lost his money, lost everything, and life meant no more to him. But just as he was about to jump, a girl passed by. A young girl with eyes like—like stars—and for a moment she turned and looked at him. Only for a moment—but in that moment her smile had saved him. It was Life that had suddenly smiled at him—from a beautiful face."

She was silent for a moment, and they heard the eternal whisper of the water.

"It's a good story," she said, not knowing that the side-canals were only three feet deep. "And we English would have spoilt it, you know—we would have forced an ending. We would have made him follow her, make love to her, marry her."

"Would that have—spoilt it?"

"I don't know," she said, considering. "Perhaps not. I expect that depends on the people. But I like your Venetian ending, the simplicity of it. It says—so much . . ." She had turned her head to him and their faces were almost touching. She dropped her eyes. She was, after all, a young English girl and in a strange place. She said suddenly, with an obvious effort: "I—I haven't got a watch. Is my hour up?"

He looked at his and found—was it possible?—that they had been together in the gondola for over two hours.

"Nearly," he said. "Do you want to go back to the *traghetto*?"

"I'm afraid I must," she said reluctantly. "I must pack, and there's the hotel bill—"

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"What time does your train go?"—as if he didn't know!

"Ten o'clock."

"And where are you staying?"

"At the *Bella Venezia*—but—"

"I'll be waiting for you at half past nine. I have," he added firmly—and truthfully—"to go to the station in any case."

"It would be a wonderful ending to Venice," she said softly, "to leave by gondola."

He swung the boat back towards the glittering lights, and reached them only too soon. And when she handed him his fifteen hundred *lire*, he took them. How could he possibly have said to her: "Don't be so extravagant! Besides, I happen to be English too—and it's *my* last night in Venice!" No, that was unthinkable—it would have been like taking a new toy away from a child. For tonight at least, let her remember her gondolier. There was always tomorrow. The morning was not so far away . . .

They were looking at one another, she on the paving above him, and he in the boat, still holding her money.

"Thank you," she said simply. "It's so sensible, sometimes, to do something that . . . isn't sensible at all. I'm glad I took a gondola. Good-bye."

How could anybody disappear so suddenly, lost in the crowd?

"Gondola, gondola!" the others were calling.

But Michael turned homeward. Back to Angelo and Maria, and back to the ghost of Zia Caterina, who must surely be smiling . . .

Maria cried all over him. She always did. He could still remember the damp sailor suits in which he had left Venice as a boy. Angelo, a trifle less demonstrative—but only a trifle—wiped his eyes and took him to the station, via the *Bella Venezia*.

It would not be at all easy, this. Michael was half longing for it and half dreading it, knowing that for a moment she was bound to hate him. An illusion would be destroyed.

But to his astonishment she was already standing on the steps of the hotel with her baggage beside her—smiling.

She was *smiling*! She looked from him to Angelo with a little amused pucker of her eyebrows, and stepped down into the gondola with perfect composure.

"Good morning," she said in English. "How good of you to remember."

"You knew!" Aghast, he stared at her as Angelo piled her uggage into the prow. "How did you know I was English?"

"That," she said, with a glance at his hand, "is a particularly English signet ring. To say nothing of the wrist watch! I gave my brother one exactly like it for his birthday."

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"Well, yes, but—"

"And when you took my books from me, I saw you glance at the titles."

"I wouldn't have called that conclusive!"

"No, but it was conclusive enough when you nearly ran into another gondola and said 'damn!'"

They both burst out laughing, Michael with mixed feelings of confusion and relief. The boat slid slowly away from the steps as Angelo thrust on his oar. Then Michael said, still puzzled:

"But then—why didn't you tell me you knew?"

She lay back on the cushion and looked at him, and her eyes were shining very gently.

"Because you were doing it all so well," she said. "And I—I didn't want to spoil your evening."

Rounding a corner the boat rocked suddenly, and they found themselves in one another's arms.

"*A turn of the wrist, Signore, and so much can be done!*"

There was no doubt about it—Angelo never needed to be told.

* * *

ANSWERS to TRAVELLERS' JOY on page 25

1. *The coach in the fairy tale "Cinderella," from the French of Charles Perrault.*
2. *The stage coach taking Tom to Rugby in "Tom Brown's Schooldays," by Thomas Hughes.*
3. *The "chariot with horses, a grey gallant pair," in the traditional song "Dabbling in the Dew."*
4. *Toad's caravan in "The Wind in the Willows," by Kenneth Grahame.*
5. *The chariot of Jehu, in the Second Book of Kings. The two kings slain were Joram and Ahaziah, and the witch, Jezebel.*
6. *The Hock-cart in "The Hock-cart, or Harvest Home," by Robert Herrick.*
7. *The sightseeing bus in "The Pastures of Heaven," by John Steinbeck. The passengers were looking down on Las Pastures del Cielo.*
8. *The carriage in the Victorian ballad "She was poor but she was honest." The occupant was the villainous army captain!*
9. *Chang's hooded chair in "Lost Horizon," by James Hilton.*

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★*Only the crumbling walls of Acre bar Napoleon's way to the conquest of the Middle East. But on these walls, directing and inspiring the small, intrepid garrison, stands Captain Sir Sidney Smith . . .*

HERO OF ACRE

by SHOWELL STYLES

HE stood on the crest of a low hill of baked earth in the blinding April sunshine; a small thin man in a shabby blue coat and cocked hat. Round him, but at a respectful distance, his generals and aides were grouped, their many-hued uniforms making him a sparrow among peacocks. Kléber, Lannes, Murat, Junot, Davout were there—the most brilliant military captains in the world—with Cafarelli the engineer and a dozen other famous experts in the arts of siege warfare. The eyes of all were turned northward, towards the distant smoke and dust of battle; for there lay the last obstacle between them and the conquest of the rich Levant, of Turkey, and of all the Orient.

They saw, beyond a flat brown plain seamed with earthworks and torn by cannon-shot, a small white-walled town that spouted smoke and flame: St. Jean d'Acre, so named by the Crusaders who had built its walls. It jutted into the sea that stretched away blue and hazy on the left hand, where a semicircle of half a dozen ships floated motionless. On the right hand, lifting from the level plain of Zebulon, the Galilean mountains hung like dusty cloths against the sky of opal.

General Bonaparte, his short legs planted firmly astride, did not take his eye from his glass. Its small circle held a picture of desperate activity. He could see through the veils of dun-coloured smoke a crumbling tower that thrust like a horn above a great bank of rubble. Up the hill of debris surged a wave of blue and white ant-like figures madly clambering into the smother. From the tower, from the crest of the rubble-bank, from the battered walls on either hand, a continuous sparkle of bright orange flashes pierced the cloud of smoke and dust, contrasting with the white flicker of steel below.

On the crest of the tower two banners hung side by side, too limp in the windless air for their blazonry to be seen; but one of them showed for a moment, against the puff of white smoke from a cannon on the walls, the red and white and blue of the English colours.

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Behind General Bonaparte one of the aides gave an exclamation and pointed out to seaward. Two line-of-battle ships and six smaller craft were anchored there, out of range of the French guns. From the ships eight boats were pulling towards the shore.

They had spread in a half-circle close inshore, and now their cannon opened fire upon the mass of blue-and-white troops that waited in reserve below the breach.

The French wave was in turmoil. It was flung back upon itself, seethed in frantic confusion for a few seconds, and then washed back down the long slope of debris.

Bonaparte closed his folding glass with a click and swung round.

"We run," he said shortly. "Veneux has failed again."

Hooves drummed on the stony plain and an officer in blue uniform with white breeches rode up. He flung himself off his horse and ran to Bonaparte.

"From Lieutenant-General Foy, general," he panted. "General Veneux is gravely wounded. We lost one hundred and three men in that last assault. Your order to attack again is requested."

Bonaparte's lowering expression lightened at the word "requested."

"There will be no further assault today," he said. "You will take my orders to Lieutenant-General Foy to withdraw."

The officer saluted and ran to his horse. Bonaparte turned and beckoned to a plump, dark-skinned man in a green-and-yellow uniform.

"Colonel Cafarelli!"

The plump man hurried up, mopping his face with a handkerchief.

"I hear it is cooler underground, colonel," said the general, without a smile at his own mild jest. "I want another mine under that north-east tower. It is ready to fall. Your last mine nearly brought it down, and I want it completely levelled."

"Just what I was saying to Junot," cried the engineer eagerly. "With that tower gone, general, the breach would be twice as wide and harder to defend. If also the ravelins the enemy have dug could be kept under fire—"

"I want your mine ready in five days," interrupted the general coldly. "You are personally responsible for its success."

Cafarelli drew up his plump figure proudly.

"You may count on me, general."

The engineer raised his cocked hat and turned away. As he did so a cannon-ball sang its way overhead to pitch fifty yards beyond the little hill. Cafarelli squeaked and ducked, then ran like a rabbit to his waiting horse.

Bonaparte raised both fists and shook them.

"The fools! They play at war! Cannot they see that we are

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ten to their one—that every man of them, Turk and English, is a dead man sooner or later? By the gods, Kléber, when I am once inside those walls I'll do as I did at Jaffa—kill every living soul!" Again an approaching round-shot sang its *crescendo* song. It slammed into the crest of the little hill not twenty paces from where Bonaparte and Kléber stood.

"That was a cursed good shot," gasped Kléber, rubbing dust from his eyes. He grasped his general by the elbow. "Best get back to quarters. We're not here to act as ninepins for them."

"A damned good shot, Mr. Boxer," remarked Captain Sir Sidney Smith. "Thirty months in a French prison haven't spoiled your aim."

James Boxer looked up from his elevation arc, his gnome-like face agrin through grime and sweat.

"Put the wind up them Frog dandies, anyways, sir," he returned. And then, to his sweating gun-crew: "More water to that swabber, you lead soldiers, you! This ain't a bleedin' six-pounder!"

The gun, a 68-pounder, was crudely mounted on the battlements of Acre close to the north-east tower. The beams and tackles and wedges which had enabled it, after long and arduous labour, to be hauled up there were still in position, for only that morning had it been got into its mounting. All the big guns of Acre—they were not many, and out-of-date at that—were on the seaward wall defending the narrow basin where the boats from *Theseus* and *Tigre* landed. From where Captain Smith stood he could look down on both sides of the ancient wall; he could oversee a contrast as great as that between life and death.

Away to the south-east the Zebulon plain spread its brown carpet to where the long ridge of Carmel bounded it; the blue curve of the sea on his right (he spared a glance for *Tigre*, who was painting her upper works) and the hazy Galilean foothills on his left were the wings of this vast stage, whose centre was occupied by the ranked tents and beehive activity of the French camp.

Between the outworks of the camp and the torn ground within musket-shot of the walls, however, there was stealthy movement, seen intermittently, of men at hide-and-seek with death. There were the dark zig-zags of the trenches running across the hot brown earth, by which the enemy reached his saps and mines.

Three mines had already been exploded and the outer masonry of the great north-east tower had been blown to dust. Two other attempts had been foiled by Armand Phélypeaux, who, with the marines from *Theseus* and *Tigre* working like navvies under his command and inspiration, had driven countermines into the enemy shafts and with explosive charges of his own devising had brought

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death to those who worked there. There were preparations on foot for more mining on the part of the French, for Captain Smith could see the baskets of earth being cast, quickly and cautiously, over the parapets.

Death claimed the remaining ground between trenches and wall. Everywhere lay the French dead, blue coats showing where lay the more recently killed; corpses a month old were hardly recognizable as human bodies, decay and vultures between them having done dreadful work. And from this terrible strip of ground, the scene of three desperate assaults, rose a stench indescribable.

Smith turned quickly away and looked over the inner parapet of the wall. The streets below were full of a cheerful throng: the Turkish soldiery with their voluminous trousers and new European jackets of red cloth, pigtailed English seamen just dismissed from their fighting quarters, veiled women selling fruit and bread, white-robed civilians chattering excitedly, and children—children everywhere, laughing, shouting, dodging between the jostling passers-by.

Captain Smith, leaning on the sun-heated stone of the parapet (where, perhaps, some mail-clad ancestor of his had leaned half a millennium before) felt suddenly the full burden of his responsibilities. Not only the future of Europe—of the world, it might be—hung upon his conduct of Acre's defence; not only the 800 English and 1,800 Orientals in his command depended upon him for very life; but there were also these humble folks—and the children.

He turned to gaze at his ships as they rode serenely in a half-circle on the blue of the Bay of Acre, naming them in his mind as his eye swept along the distant line. *Négresse*, *Marie Rose*, *Dame de Grâce*—those were the French gun vessels he had captured in that lightning descent from the north before the siege began—then his own *Tigre* anchored in five fathoms. He knew that but for that disposition of his ships Acre would have fallen a month ago. The walled town was shaped like a diamond of which two sides projected into the sea. The ships could protect these sides and a part of each of the landward sides, but at the apex of the landward sides, where stood the north-east tower, the enemy was out of range; and there they had made their breach. It was narrow as yet, that breach. Only five or six men could storm abreast up the steep hill of debris that filled it. But Captain Smith knew well that sooner or later it would be made wider, and then the overwhelming numbers of the French would tell against his motley garrison.

Boxer's voice at his elbow made him start.

"Nice an' quiet-like now, sir," said he, saluting. "Reportin' losses, sir—fifteen killed in this morning's assault, six of them

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Turks. Five of these All-bunion musketeers gone, too—must've been shot down off the walls. The Frogs lost a clear hundred against our twenty, sir."

He was plainly exultant, but Sir Sidney looked grave.

"They can afford a hundred dead," he said. "We cannot afford twenty. Wounded?"

"Lieutenant Bushby, *Tigre*, sword-cut in thigh. Lieutenant Stock, marines, part of his face blowed off—ravin', he is. Twelve seamen, four marines, twenty-four Turks. None of 'em like to die, sir. An' Colonel Phélypeaux, he got a flesh wound in the arm, runnin' out to bring a wounded marine off the breach."

Captain Smith exclaimed angrily. "He shouldn't have been there at all, damme! We can spare him least of any."

"That's true, by Mahound!" Wright put in heartily. "I never thought to see a Frenchman as was a better man than me, but the colonel's that one. He's with the old buzzard—I mean the Pasha—now, sir. I was to tell you the Pasha wants a council while the Frogs give us a chance."

The captain sighed wearily. Djezzar Pasha was not the least of his troubles. A week ago he had suddenly announced his intention of abandoning Acre and withdrawing his Turks and Albanians northward into Syria, and had only been persuaded to give up this plan by Sir Sidney's promise to blow up every building in Acre the moment any move was made towards retreat. The wily Butcher was brave enough, but he could not be brought to see the vital importance of his crumbling fortress in checking the French advance.

Wright, hearing that sigh, looked anxiously at his master. The lean hawk-face, sunburnt and unshaven, bore the marks of fatigue, though all the old eager fire burned in the sunken eyes.

"Beggin' pardon, sir," he said, "but you did ought to get some sleep. We can't spare the colonel, but if you was to fall sick we'd all be done."

"I do very well, Mr. Wright, I thank you," returned the captain, with a touch of his old hauteur. Then his loftiness fell from him and he reached a hand to rest it on the other's shoulder for a second. "You and I and Phélypeaux," he said quietly, "we cannot spare ourselves, my friend. I saw you rally the Turks this morning. It's by example we hold these heathens together."

Wright shuffled his feet and reddened, as he always did at praise from his captain.

"They're a wild lot, I reckon," he said, "but a few more of 'em wouldn't come amiss. What of the army, sir, as was promised by the Sultan? An' the ships, too? We're countin' on them to come pretty soon, I reckon?"

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In venturing that question Wright risked severe rebuff and knew it. Every man in the little garrison was aware that the Sultan had promised, before the *Tigre* had made her southward dash from Constantinople, that an army of 80,000 should march overland through Damascus while Hassan Bey with the Turkish fleet would sail for Acre as soon as it was in fighting trim. But Sir Sidney steadfastly refused to consider any plan that rested on the probability of fleet or army arriving; he believed that the Sultan would keep his word, but he knew too well the inevitable delays and procrastinations of the Turks to count upon their arrival in time to aid him. The captain's gaze was far away upon the blue of the horizon.

"We count upon nothing but our courage," he said slowly at last, as though to himself. "Yet at each assault we must lose men, at each new bombardment our walls are weakened. While they can send only a narrow spearhead up to the breach we can hold them—though we had but a hundred Englishmen left. But when the breach is widened, when yonder machine of an army can roll against us a score or fifty abreast, then—"

He stopped abruptly and faced his secretary. A smile grew upon his lips.

"Well, then, Mr. Wright," he said almost gaily, "we shall have the fight of our lives. I trust we are ready for it?"

Wright's broad grin answered him.

"By Mahound, sir, we are that! I never saw our lads so contented. Mr. Inglefield swears he can't find defaulters enough to man these burial-parties—and the flies profitin' by it."

Sir Sidney passed a hand swiftly across his brow. "That may yet be our gravest danger—disease. But the present holds greater concern. I must see Colonel Phélypeaux about this new mine of theirs. They must not open another breach—come, Mr. Wright, we must attend this council."

They moved away along the wall.

That was on the twenty-fifth day of April.

At dusk on the twenty-ninth day of April, Captain Smith stood upon the breach of Acre.

The night was still; but the stillness was not silence. On the windless air came the hum of massed men, occasional bugle-calls, the whinny of a horse, the sharp challenge of a sentry, all far away as in a dream. The French camp could be seen as well as heard, for the orange-red twinkle of countless fires made a long chain across the darkness. Presently there came the approaching crunch of booted feet climbing over the pile of fallen masonry. The captain stirred and turned. The new-comer wore the shako and

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white cross-belts of the marines; in the darkness his scarlet coat looked black. He stopped just below the captain and saluted.

"Major Oldfield, sir—marines. My party is present and correct."

"Thank you, major." Oldfield was in command of the *Theseus*'s marines. "Colonel Douglas is there?"

"Yes, sir." As he spoke heavy footsteps stumbled on the rubble and a voice checked itself on the first word of an oath. "Here's the colonel, sir."

Colonel Douglas, a large man of corpulent habit, loomed out of the obscurity.

"My people are ready, captain," he muttered, breathing heavily.

"Your men should creep forward, keeping as low as possible, until the alarm is given," ordered Captain Smith. "Major, will you bring your men over on the left, single file? Colonel—yours on the right, if you please—and good luck, gentlemen."

The captain returned the two half-seen salutes and the two withdrew down the breach into the town. A minute later the marines began to file over the ridge of rubble on to the dim ground in front of the walls, moving as silently as possible with bayoneted musket held at the ready, following the lead of their officers. Before the last man had crossed, Wright and Colonel Phélypeaux were standing beside Sir Sidney.

"Mr. Wright," said the captain, "bring your seamen over the breach now. Mass them below here and wait for my word."

"Aye aye, sir."

Wright disappeared. Captain Smith turned to Phélypeaux.

"You are to take no risks that aren't essential to this project, colonel," he said quietly.

"I shall destroy their mine, captain, and return at once," returned Phélypeaux, in the same tone.

Then Phélypeaux, too, had vanished into the shadows. Sir Sidney remained alone on the crest of the breach, straining eyes and ears in the darkness.

In his mind's eye he could see Oldfield's marines creeping among the stinking corpses and uneven ground beneath the north-east tower and out towards the flanking trench the enemy had dug to protect his mining operations; on the right hand Colonel Douglas—swearing under his breath, no doubt—would be nearing the trench on the other flank. Their task was to take and occupy those trenches while Wright's hundred seamen, with Phélypeaux in their midst, rushed the main entrenchment, entered the sap, and held it until the colonel of engineers had destroyed the preparations for the mine.

A shout, instantly followed by a musket-shot, broke the stillness.

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At once the night was rent by a hoarse cheer away on the left. Captain Smith bent forward and spoke into the darkness.

"Mr. Wright—advance your party."

"Follow me, Tigers!" Wright sang out.

Disdaining stealth now that the alarm was given, the seamen surged forward.

But now the darkness was alive with musket-flashes and reverberant with noise. It was possible to form some idea of the progress of the fight by those flashes; on both sides they were moving away towards the enemy, which meant that the marines were in both trenches and advancing along them.

A sudden roar of cheering came from the centre. Wright and his men must have taken the sappers unawares, for there had been no musketry before that cheer. On the right Colonel Douglas's men appeared to have routed the French—the musket-flashes were intermittent and far down the line. But out of the medley of explosions and yells there came two lightning-strokes of flame and the double boom of cannon. The French had brought up two field-pieces on that side and those in the trenches had retreated, leaving the marines exposed to cannon-fire.

How long would the centre assault take? Why was Phélypeaux so tardy? Unable to contain his restlessness, Captain Smith leapt down from the breach and ran across the open space behind it. The seamen from the *Theseus*, under Lieutenant Brook, were mustered there with musket and cutlass. The captain ignored them and raced up the winding stair that led to the battlements. Mr. Boxer and his gun's crew stood to attention as he approached.

"Lay her on those cannon-flashes four points on your starboard now," he ordered, "and stand by."

"Done a'ready," Boxer responded. The glowing match he held illuminated his elfish features in an unearthly manner. "See there, sir—there's three guns now."

The captain made no reply. He was leaning far out over the battlements, straining his eyes futilely for the signal that meant Phélypeaux had done his work and the raiding parties could return. There was little to be seen in the centre where Wright and his men were fighting; but a confusion of howling and cheering came to his ears above the din. His seamen were armed with cutlass and pike—no firearms had been carried by the centre party. The absence of musket-flashes, then, must indicate that the French were closely engaged and unable to fire. Would the signal never come?

Out of the invisible ground, a pistol-shot from the north-east tower, rose a splendid flower of flame, white and yellow and orange. The wall on which he stood rocked to the thunder of the explosion. Fragments of earth rained down out of the dark as he blinked

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dazzled eyes and looked eagerly for the signal—though indeed it was scarcely necessary now. It came almost before the reverberations of that eruption had died—a rocket soaring in brief parabola into the sky.

"Open fire, and elevate as you estimate their retreat," snapped the captain, as he hurried past Boxer and his gun.

Before he had reached the stairway the wall shook again to the discharge of "Little Nell." Colonel Douglas would be retreating as fast as he could now, so that shots to harass the field-pieces would hardly endanger the marines. He gained the street. Already the *Theseus*'s men were mounting into position on either side of the narrow gap ready to oppose a possible assault as the sortie returned. Captain Smith climbed to the centre of the breach and waited.

"Here they come, sir," said Brook's voice.

Figures, like pieces of darkness taking substance, began to appear, trotting out of the fire-flecked void. They were marines of Colonel Douglas's command. By twos and threes they scrambled gasping up the breach, stumbling and exhausted. A lieutenant of marines, his left arm held clutched to his breast, approached the dark figure in the boat-cloak. His breath came in great sobs.

"Major Oldfield, sir—killed. We—had to—leave him."

Smith muttered an acknowledgement and the lieutenant stumbled on into the town. Oldfield gone—what of Douglas? He caught the arm of a marine, one of the last to come in.

"You're a *Tigre* man?"

"Yessir."

"Where's your colonel?"

"Took a party towards the sap to 'elp the Jacks, sir." The man, rendered loquacious by excitement, had breath enough to talk further. "The Frogs got their bellyful, sir, spite o' that grapeshot. They ain't follerin' up—not they. We lost plenty, all the same—"

The captain pushed him aside. Armand, of course, would be among the last; that was where his great spirit would keep him—in the place of honour. Now came one or two wounded, assisted by marines. Wright's deep voice came out of the night: "Step lively lads. Show the reds we can—we can—" It tailed away strangely.

"Take his legs, sergeant," said Colonel Douglas's wheezy voice.

Last of all—but where was Armand, then?—four men toiled slowly up the rubble-heap. The seamen raised a cheer as they came. Colonel Douglas panted close behind two men who carried another between them. The colonel came up to Captain Smith.

"A damned successful operation, captain," he wheezed. "Losses, yes—but there'll be no pursuit. Mr. Wright here is wounded. There's others—"

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"Colonel Phélypeaux?" jerked the captain.

The colonel of marines hesitated. From behind him came Wright's feeble voice.

"He's—gone, sir. Sent us clear o' the sap an' blew up all their powder barrels, himself along with them. He said he'd—make sure, sir—"

Again his voice faded into silence. The roar of the big gun on the battlements was like a salute.

The day following the destruction of the French mine and the death of Armand Phélypeaux was marked by a strange quiet. There was neither bombardment nor assault, and as far as could be seen the French were making no attempt to strengthen their trenches. Out on the sun-baked battleground small parties of seamen and Turks moved freely about their unsavoury task of burial within hail of similar parties of the enemy. The men who lined the walls had orders not to open fire, upon pain of flogging, without Sir Sidney's express command.

That was the last day of respite the garrison of Acre were to have.

The wrath of General Bonaparte began to express itself at dawn of the following day. For four hours the great siege guns he had brought from Jaffa hurled their shot against the walls, supplemented by the field-pieces which had been brought into emplacements thrown up during the night. The wall, already pitted and weakened, was brought down on the east of the tower with many Turkish casualties. At one point it was less than thirty feet high.

In the heat of the day came the assault. Two thousand men in a dense, slow-moving column advanced from the French camp, entered the trenches, and in spite of a flanking fire from *Tigre* and *Theseus* came on in a yelling cheering horde.

The breach was assailed by half of them, while the rest reared scaling ladders against the thirty-foot portion of the ruined wall. Six ladders they placed, in the face of a hot fire from Turks and Albanians. Pikes and beams thrust the ladders outward, with their freight of yelling Frenchmen, to crash in dreadful confusion on the heads of those below; but again and yet again they were placed, and four times the enemy gained a footing on the wall before the whirling sabres of the Turks cleared the battlements.

At the breach wave after wave mounted to the attack. And when at last Bonaparte called off his troops, the call came for volunteers to dig new flanking ravelins outside the breach and to raid the French trenches for gabions.

More marines were brought ashore to form night-sortie parties. At dark the enemy trenches were attacked and cleared, held for twenty minutes while the defences were destroyed, and evacuated

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again. Before dawn the French had thrown in strong reinforcements and repaired the damage, enabling their determined assault to be made in the earliest light of morning.

This was the precursor of many such days and nights—a relentless succession of hammer blows slowly pounding the impudent opposers of the Unconquerable Republic into the desert sand. By day the defenders stood doggedly against the dust and uproar of a bombardment or wrought bloodily with musket and pike in the furious mêlée at the breach; by night they harassed the French entrenchments with sudden wild raids. Sir Sidney and Colonel Douglas were forced to impose a rota by which some sleep at least might be assured to each man one night out of two.

As for Captain Smith himself, no one knew when he slept, or whether he slept at all. Wright, wounded and immobilized, was no longer able to look after him. He contrived to appear shaved and immaculately dressed, yet smoke and dust and sweat encompassed him as they did his men. He was ubiquitous. As James Boxer, master gunner, remarked to Titus Wright: "'E acts as though the 'ole blasted place 'd fall to bits if 'e ain't there to watch over it—and by God I reckon 'e's right!"

Boxer had snatched the opportunity of a ten-minute relief from his gun to visit Wright in the gloomy dungeon under the seaward wall, which Sir Sidney had converted into a hospital.

The muffled *rafale* of musketry, so customary a sound that neither had been conscious of it, gave place to a succession of heavy thuds and the long crash and rattle of falling masonry.

"'Ere we go," said Mr. Boxer, getting up hastily. "I got to be in on this. I'll wager," he added, as he picked his way between the palliasses to the door, "as the cap'n's in it a'ready."

But there the master gunner was wrong. Sir Sidney, for once, belied the legend that was growing up around him. He was closeted with Djezzar Pasha on a matter of high importance.

The Djezzar sat cross-legged on the piled cushions of his state apartment. His dark wrinkled face, its fierce black eyes gleaming beneath the snowy turban, showed excitement. Sir Sidney stood beside him, leaning forward eagerly. Both were listening to the rapid speech of a ragged and travel-stained Syrian who had been brought in from the outworks under the north-west wall.

The Englishman could not understand the message, but he guessed its purport. The Syrian ended, and the Pasha turned eagerly to the captain.

"We are saved!" he exclaimed, in his clumsy French. "And you, *notre sauveur*—you have saved my country!"

"It is the army?" inquired Sir Sidney, disregarding this encomium.

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"Yes—the army! This man has seen it—as the sea-sand for numbers—marching from Damascus. That was four days ago, *mon ami* Schmitt! Tomorrow they may be here—certainly tomorrow!"

The Djezzar was in an exalted mood. Sir Sidney took advantage of it to press a matter that had long weighed upon him.

"There is one matter, Your Excellency. The cartridges for your marksmen. It would assist me if you would tell me how many remain in the arsenal."

In accordance with old custom, it was the practice, during a battle, for the Djezzar, sitting in the portico of his palace, to give the musket cartridges from his own hand into the hands of the Turkish soldiers. Over this supply Sir Sidney had no control; and he knew too well how short of ammunition were his own marines.

The Djezzar waved an impatient hand.

"There are enough. I know not how many."

"If Your Excellency would be good enough to ask your secretary—"

The Djezzar snapped his fingers angrily, but he summoned his secretary, who tremblingly announced that but four hundred cartridges remained and that no materials were left for making more.

Sir Sidney gave no sign of the dismay this news brought him. He took a ceremonious leave of the Pasha and left him making preparations for the reception of the Sultan's general when the relieving army arrived. But unless that army did indeed arrive, and soon, the garrison would be in a very difficult situation.

The news that the Turkish army was at hand leaked out before the expected assault took place. The men, filled with a new hope, flung back the wave of French from the widened breach with such fury that the attack was withdrawn after an hour's struggle.

On the next day every man whose post gave him an outlook to eastward, along the hazy line of the Galilean hills, strained his eyes for the dust-cloud that would mark the approach of a great army. At noon a dust-cloud was seen. But it proved to be a large force of French, infantry and cavalry, returning with colours flying and drums beating to their camp.

There was a night assault. And a sullen but exultant prisoner, taken at the close of some desperate fighting, bragged to his captors the news which Sir Sidney later extracted from him.

Bonaparte had sent Kléber's division to oppose the Turkish army at the ford of the Jordan. He had simultaneously dispatched all his cavalry, in two detachments, to encircle the Turks from both flanks. Kléber, fighting stubbornly, had been surrounded and driven slowly back. Then the Chasseurs and Hussars had charged

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from their ambush in the hills. They had broken the Sultan's army, scattered it, cut it in pieces.

Hard on the heels of this disastrous news came another blow. Three French frigates had arrived off the Levant coast, and had captured an ammunition convoy sent in advance of the Turkish fleet. Three days ago Sir Sidney had ordered Captain Miller to weigh anchor and go in search of them.

On the morning following the news of the Turkish defeat the *Theseus* limped back to Acre. The frigates had given battle, a lucky shot had found the *Theseus*'s magazine, and Captain Miller and thirty-two seamen had been killed.

That day's bombardment was the fiercest Acre had yet undergone. And in the assault that followed the French gained the angle of the wall beside the north-east tower and were only driven out at the expense of heavy losses.

Losses . . . men killed by musket-ball, by bayonet-thrust, by flying masonry or the collapse of the battered wall, by disease—above all by disease. A slight wound, now, seemed to bring death. Yet they held the walls and held the breach through endless days of inferno. And every man, seaman or marine, Turk or Albanian, drew strength and dogged courage from the man who led them.

They had looked to him in dismay when that first blow—the destruction of the relieving army—fell; and he had shown no sign of faltering in his resolve. The assurance and cheerful swagger of his light step said plainly that he had been prepared for that blow—nay, had expected it, and that he had no doubt at all that the garrison would win through despite it. So with the succeeding disasters. He made no sentimental speeches, no appeals for support. He simply took it for granted that their spirit was as great as his, and flung body and soul into the desperate work of defence.

More amazing than ever, in these days, was the captain's omnipresence. He seemed to permeate the little fortress, to be everywhere at once with his light step and his eager hawk-face. If, as might be held, a man whose mind is set upon and obsessed by a single objective to the exclusion of all others is mad, then Sir Sidney was certainly mad. Saints, emperors, great artists, great scientists, have been called mad for this same reason. Captain Sir Sidney Smith's madness partook of the nature of each.

He was utterly happy. Plainly before him lay his path of duty. He had only to follow it steadfastly to the end. For those who must suffer and die with him he had compassion, but not remorse. He did not allow himself to entertain the possibility of relief; every nerve and sinew and thought was strained to its uttermost in the struggle to bar the French from the north and world conquest.

The siege was nearing its sixtieth day.

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"Eight thousand three hundred and seven," muttered General Bonaparte, staring at the report.

"Eight thousand left," he repeated, frowning. "And eight general officers killed or wounded."

"It is still an army, general," said Junot, surreptitiously unbuttoning the collar of his uniform.

General Lannes, scowling, struck his hand on the table.

"*Comment?*" he barked. "An army? It's not the quarter of an army! We have stayed here far too long. I advised a retreat a fortnight ago. Now—"

"Now," interrupted Kléber, leaning forward with his hands on his massive thighs and staring at Lannes, "retreat is impossible."

Bonaparte's eyes, cold and brilliant like a serpent's, met those of his three generals in turn.

"I do not wish," he said slowly, "to hear that word 'retreat' from my executive officers. Wounds, fever, death at the hand of a stubborn enemy, have reduced my army to eight thousand effectives. That is bad. But I am seven times as strong as this mad sea captain is, even now. What will the world say of me if I turn tail?"

An aide-de-camp, his face streaming sweat, pushed aside the tent-flap and saluted hurriedly.

"The Turkish fleet, general! It was sighted at dawn—"

Bonaparte heard him out, then swung round upon his generals.

"The Turkish fleet is becalmed," he rapped. "We strike at once—at once! Kléber, Lannes, you will command the assault jointly. I want four thousand men. They will march for the breach in half an hour, and they will march over it. See to it!"

The two generals saluted hastily and hurried out. General Bonaparte, disregarding salutes, hastened through the jostling throng of men and officers to the blare of bugles and climbed on to his horse. He was in the forward battery and surveying the ships and the town through his glass before the 4,000 had formed into column.

In the heat shimmer between flat brown land and flat blue sea Acre hung like a mirage. The great breach gaped dark and ragged in its white walls, spouting thin jets of dust as the French siege guns on the right pounded it. In spite of the bombardment there was an ordered activity in the neighbourhood of the breach, as well as on the walls whence an intermittent sullen boom—the voice of "Little Nell"—replied to the French cannonade.

The beach battery was not, for the moment, under fire, nor was it firing on the town. General Bonaparte ordered its guns to be trained round to seaward, anticipating an attempt on the part of the ships to use their guns against the advancing troops. The commander of Acre, as he knew from the reports of his observers, had brought many boat-loads of seamen and marines ashore, as

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well as several guns from his ships; but he guessed that some gun-crews at least would have been left on board.

The booming of the siege guns slackened and ceased. A bugle sang high and clear. Out from the fringes of the camp moved an immense dark mass of fighting-men, their bayonets twinkling in the sunlight. Guns flashed and thudded from the *Tigre*, motionless beyond half a mile of glassy sea. The beach battery opened fire in reply. Bonaparte, heedless of the deafening uproar, clambered up until he could rest his glass on the parapet.

Steadily, relentlessly as the onset of a storm-cloud before the wind, the dark mass of soldiers rolled forward across the plain. They were formed in two columns, each with twenty men abreast, and they moved side by side in perfect step to the tap of the drums. The 68-pounder on the battlements flung its heavy shot into the middle of that moving carpet of humanity, the *Tigre*'s guns scored hit after hit upon it. It did not falter.

The head of the double column was some two hundred paces from the foot of the breach, and out of danger from the 68-pounder, when a volley from the two ravelins dug in front of the breach by the defenders took effect on the foremost ranks. Still there was no check in the French advance. Kléber, tossing back his mane of yellow hair as he strode in advance, told himself that the English were holding their fire until the last moment.

"Frenchmen—follow me!" he shouted in his bull's voice, and leapt at the slope.

Lannes, his face purple, struggled after him. With a hoarse shout the men, forty abreast, surged up to the breach. Not musketry, but a volley of stones met them half-way up. Some were hurt, but the densely packed mass rushed on with a shout of derisive laughter.

They had almost gained the crest—Kléber was already setting foot on it, brandishing his sword—when Captain Smith's four cannon roared from their concealed emplacements on the breach itself. A storm of grape swept the slope at point-blank range. The column was checked at last. Lannes was down, wounded. Kléber, unhurt, bellowed at them to advance.

They gained the crest before the cannon could reload—indeed, the cannoneers had fled. A flashing barrier of Turkish sabres met them, holding the front rank for perhaps a minute. Then the irresistible pressure of the thousands pushing up in the rear bore the French van forward, sweeping them on and over the breach. The open space behind the breach was deserted. Where, then, were those terrible English seamen? They had no time to ponder the matter. The inner slope of rubble, densely packed with triumphant Frenchmen, suddenly erupted in a mighty sheet of flame. Captain Smith had mined the breach.

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But a hundred men killed and wounded could not stem the dark blue flood. Over the breach they poured still, scrambling into and out of the smoking mine-crater, spurning the bodies of dead and dying as they rushed, hallooing like madmen, into the fortress that had withstood them for so long. Kléber, towering head and shoulders above his men, pointed with his sword, unable to make even his tremendous voice heard above the tumult.

The narrow streets leading from that small open square were heavily barricaded, but the wide archway on the right, towards which the general was gesticulating, appeared to have been hastily barred. Behind it Turkish soldiers could be heard shouting defiant war-cries. A score of eager soldiers flung themselves at it and a hundred others pressed behind them. The archway barricade yielded and they burst through into a large rectangular garden, at the farther end of which the blank face of a building rose above low bushes.

There was no enemy to be seen. Those who had entered hesitated and then tried to push their way out; but they were overwhelmed by the new arrivals who crowded in eager for victory and plunder. The Pasha's seraglio garden, until recently only looked into by his trusted Albanians, was packed from wall to wall with puzzled French soldiers.

Too late Kléber, who had remained outside, saw that the garden ran beneath the inner wall. Too late he saw the red-coated marines rising all along that wall, musket at shoulder. His order to withdraw was lost in the crash of a volley. A second followed, and a third. Every shot took effect. The garden became a shambles.

That Sir Sidney had been able to issue each marine with only four shots made no difference to the result of that ambush. It needed but three volleys to change five hundred victorious soldiers into a fear-maddened rabble. Panic spread like lightning. It became pandemonium when from the hidden postern of the seraglio the Turks charged with the sabre, driving the bewildered men like sheep towards the archway.

The strength of panic proved greater than the impetus of the still entering hordes. On the breach the advance slowed as the infection spread. The fugitives, hurling themselves upward frantically to cross to the plain and swifter flight, checked it. In a moment it would have turned into retreat. Kléber, gigantic, bellowing, cleared a circle with his naked sword and brandished aloft the standard he had torn from the hand of its flying bearer. They rallied to that heroic figure. But only for a few seconds.

Out from behind the barricades of the narrow streets, like angry bees from a hive, rushed a swarm of cheering seamen with Sir Sidney at their head. Cutlasses whirling like flails, the men of *Tigre* and *Theseus*—stripped to the waist, in the mode they preferred

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for all such enterprises—leaped like so many hairy monkeys upon the blue-uniformed veterans. At the same moment the marines from the wall burst in a furious charge on their other flank.

As a few farm-hands urge a herd of cattle through a narrow gateway, so Sir Sidney and his men herded that disorderly mob, that had been General Bonaparte's pride, out of Acre. When at last the defenders stood breathless and bloody on the breach among the heaped corpses of the French, they saw the plain below them streaming with flying troops. Twelve hundred men had routed four thousand with scarcely a casualty to themselves and terrible loss to the enemy.

"Pursuit, captain?" wheezed Colonel Douglas, coming up to where Sir Sidney stood leaning on his reddened sword. "My lads can drive the lesson home."

The captain turned from gazing into the sun-dazzle of the plain.

"No pursuit, sir," he said, coolly as ever. "I want the walls manned at once."

The colonel saluted and wheezed orders at his waiting men. Sir Sidney, turning, found James Boxer at his elbow. The master gunner knuckled his forehead.

"By y'r leave, sir, there's Mr. Wright, sir, tryin' to get up to you. Seems as 'ow 'e's got news—"

A sudden uproar of cheering drowned his words. Sir Sidney swung round. A tall figure leaning on a broken French rifle was coming up from the street, stumbling through the throng of seamen. Eager hands caught him up and fairly carried him to the crest of the breach. Wright's face, pale and wasted by suffering, bore a grin as wide as any his master had seen there.

"You've won the game, sir," he gasped, characteristically giving all credit to his captain. "The boats are coming!"

"The boats?"

"I saw them, sir, from the wall—and by Mahound, sir, they're packed with Turkish troops! They're rowin' in ships' boats, hard as they can go. In an hour they'll be here."

Sir Sidney turned away abruptly. He did not wish his wildly cheering men to see his face. In all the long trial of the siege he had shown them a calm and confident front; they must not see, in this moment of intense relief, that he was near to breaking down. He looked towards the French camp, but his eyes were blurred and he did not see it. Nor did he see the blue-uniformed figure that raised itself painfully from behind a pile of dead and levelled its heavy musket at his breast.

But Wright saw it. With a cry of "Look out, sir!" he flung himself down the slope, dragging his wounded leg. The musket

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exploded when Wright was close upon the Frenchman. He fell forward with his great hands clutching the man's throat.

Sir Sidney, the first to reach them, found that both were dead.

Captain Smith stood alone upon the top of the north-east tower. Beside him the English flag fluttered in company with the standard of Turkey, for the morning breeze was strong and cool. He looked to the south, where the long range of Carmel rose grey under the colourless sky that waited the flush of sunrise.

The camp of General Bonaparte was no more. His heavy guns had been dragged into the sea or buried, his useless gear burned. All that remained was a mottled scar on the face of the plain, and a faint cloud of dust farther away in which might just be discerned the tiny figures of marching men—the rearguard of a beaten army.

Below the captain, pacing the ruined wall, Lieutenant Inglefield watched the retreat, turning his face to the south at every swing-about of his quarterdeck-length walk.

Lieutenant Inglefield, pausing in his walk, looked up curiously at the lonely figure on the tower. Did his captain realize, he wondered, how remarkable was his achievement? What was he thinking as he stood motionless there? Of the promotion that surely awaited him in England, of the fêtes and honours and orders that would be his—or of his friends who had died in his service?

A crowd had begun to surge in the streets below the wall; Turks, marines, seamen, women, children—all pointing and shouting after the defeated French. A seaman in the crowd—Boxer it was—raised an excited arm towards the brooding figure on the tower and bellowed for three cheers. The resulting roar must have reached the ears of Bonaparte's rearguard.

Lieutenant Inglefield looked up expectantly as his captain stirred and drew himself erect, raising an arm for silence. He would speak to them all, no doubt, of their triumph and the glory that they had won.

The crowd fell silent; and in that moment the first broad ray of the rising sun shot from the eastern hilltops to the zenith, a golden pathway laid straight and plain across the heavens. Captain Smith, his lean hawk-face lit by that shining path, turned to the men below him.

"Mr. Inglefield," he said clearly, "hands to breakfast, if you please."

* * *

In respect to violins, I am polygamous.

FRITZ KREISLER

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ENCHANTED MEADOW

There, playing in the moonlight, were the creatures of a lost world

by PAUL ROCHE

WE had not breathed a word of the expedition to our friends at Ajaccio. On that I had insisted, for I dared not face the storm of ridicule and perhaps of superstition it would have raised. Unbelievable as it seemed, we were going into the mountains of central Corsica to trap the Gezeka!

And what did we know of the Gezeka? Nothing. That is, of course, nothing beyond some tom-foolery in a little fourteenth century treatise picked up a fortnight previously in the ancient monastery of Monte Tindaro; a little pig-skin thing, entitled "De Gezekibus" written by an old monk called Ghisoni. Peter, my companion at Barts, had become sufficiently interested in it to copy it out, and to my amusement, and then to my alarm, it came so to fascinate him that he began to persuade even me to take it seriously.

Ghisoni, it seems, towards the end of his life had become so obsessed with an event in his youth, that his religious superior, wishing no doubt to purge the old man's head of fancies, had ordered him to write it down. There resulted a tale the vividness of which even I began to find disturbing.

Wandering one day in the mountains of Corsica with his dog, his flute to his lips, the young man had suddenly found himself before a creature of a lost world—the half mythological Gezeka. Thinking he was bewitched he ran home as fast as possible, but later, strengthened by the company of other youths, he came back, and, reassured by their identical experience, studied all he saw and wrote it down.

What a description it makes! An animal like a ball, "all belly" ("*totus quasi venter veluti pallo*"), about the size of a marmoset, covered with fur, and "spinning"—that is his word—at great speed across the rocks. More amazing still, doing this by lightning somersaults on its legs, head and tail, which were afterwards pulled into the body, as a tortoise's head is pulled into its shell.

Of course, no one believed the story, but rumour and superstition began to attach to Ghisoni's excursions into the wilderness,

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and, when in late summer malaria threatened the village, the whole campagna became alarmed and fled to the coast to escape an evidently malignant spell. They never returned, and a few months later Ghisoni left the island and, though only sixteen, took the Benedictine habit at Monte Tindaro in northern Sicily.

This, then, was the mad story that had captivated the imagination of a twentieth century medical student, and started him off on the adventure into which I now found myself being inveigled. And so, with a month's holiday before us, and armed with the minute directions of *De Gezekibus* we found ourselves setting out to discover Ghisoni's fabulous " Gezekery."

The first step was to make ourselves known to an old charcoal-burner at Castagno, the village before the great forest; for he claimed nothing less than to have surprised a herd of Gezekas playing beneath the harvest moon. I smiled at his stories, but the smile died away as they grew into Ghisoni's own descriptions.

The gay, almost human laughter; the sobbing that filled the forest after the raid of a fox or a wolf; the shape and colour, the antics, the telepathic sense of human presence that could not be dulled except by music: all were there, all were what we had read of in the quaint Latin of the little old pigskin volume.

In spite of ourselves we became excited, and attracted the suspicion of the charcoal-burner.

" Ah, I have told you too much," he cried. " You will never find the Gezeka. You are wasting your time. Go back to Calacuccia; there is good boar-hunting there."

Nevertheless, with the help of a *douceur* we extracted from him the information we wanted.

On the morning of September 16th, at precisely twenty minutes past ten, with our gear loaded upon three donkeys, we moved off into the deep forest.

The sky was blue and the air fragrant with pine and myrtle as we stepped through the chestnut woods over ground-patterns of russet and gold. We splashed through streams and jade-green pools. We climbed under hazel copses carpeted with cyclamen. We brushed past thickets of arbutus, brown-barked and glossy-leaved, their waxen flowers dangling like orange blossom and their berries beginning to change colour. Our ears were full of woodland noises; the cry of a jay flashing ahead; the trickle of a rill; the flageolet-like note, never far off, of the ring ousel.

At about noon the rear donkey developed a sore, and when we halted to adjust its harness I discovered that our canvas medical bag was missing. As far as Peter was concerned (for I was not yet a believer), the loss was disastrous, for the bag contained the one

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thing necessary for keeping a Gezeka alive. With some excitement Boco our guide was sent to retrace our steps, leaving Peter brooding over that dismal passage of *De Gezekibus* which says :

" It is impossible to take a Gezeka alive. Twice we thought to have triumphed, and twice within a few minutes disaster followed Once the creature expired in a fit of madness, and once it tore off a piece of the pannier in which we carried it and drove this through its breast."

Twenty minutes went by and we watered the animals and made some tea. Then to Peter's joy Boco returned, with a grin on his face, and the precious bag swinging from his arm. He had found it hanging from a thorn bush. Everything was intact : chief of all the syringe and the serum—the all-important serum which was to stay the terror of our victim and keep it in a gentle coma until claustrophobia had passed.

We pushed on, and towards noon of the second day approached the Gezeka country—a table-land spreading out between gorges, and dipping off in small rocky savannahs to the sea. It answered exactly to Ghisoni's descriptions, and we went no farther.

For three days we remained in camp, waiting. There was great peace. To screen our presence and confound the famous telepathic sense, Boco was encouraged at all times to play upon his reed.

Without let, his exquisite airs floated through the timeless atmosphere of our day, and we lived and moved like creatures of an enchanted world.

There was one worry however : no rain had fallen for five months, and if the wet season broke upon us now we should be caught, with all our equipment, between raging gullies in a morass of mud. Every day the air grew heavier.

We became restless. In the afternoon of the fourth day, while we were at lunch, a shout from Boco brought us jumping to our feet. It was the harbinger of things to come. All agog we gazed up in the direction of his quivering finger.

" *Signori*, do you not see ? " he gasped with excitement. " Four of them : the Halcyon Swallows."

At first all we made out were specks against the copper sky, but soon we could indeed see that they were birds, wheeling and tumbling at a great height. They swung in arcs, gradually approaching the earth, until we could tell their markings—a moonlit grey, flecked on the under sides with seams of white and blue. They called to each other in a kind of lament, plaintive and flute-like.

Fascinated we kept our binoculars upon the birds.

" Watch," says Ghisoni, " for the Halcyon Swallow. Its appearance betokens Gezekas, for without it they will not venture

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forth." And then that further sign, which I pretended against all my hopes could not be true: "When the Halcyon is in the skies but ceases to cry out, know that the Gezeka is actually out and feeding." I grew excited.

But thunder clouds were massing behind the mountains, and Peter and I set off after lunch to retrieve a valuable cache of food dumped some miles away, leaving Boco to play upon his pipe.

It was towards sunset, as we began to return from our expedition, that a fact dawned upon us: the Halcyon Swallows were mute. All day they had been calling and circling in the sky, and now they were silent, flying low.

Our excitement, so suddenly awakened, then received a greater shock, for, bursting through the maquis like a gorilla, Boco flung himself in our path: "Gezekas," he stammered, "I've seen the Gezekas. Three large and two small, it's unbelievable. Come quickly."

Hardly daring to put one foot before the other we crept with him to the edge of the meadow and stared into the coming dusk, scrutinizing, as he told us to, a plot of grass and juniper about thirty yards ahead. Boco meanwhile, like a mad Pan, played upon his pipe. But there was nothing: only the boulders and the tufts of marjoram among the grass. Was it superstition after all, I wondered?

After eleven the moon rose and I was beginning to think how nice it would be to have a plateful of bacon and eggs when a fantastic vision passed before my eyes. I pinched myself; but no, I was not asleep: six extraordinary little creatures, playful and alert, were outlined in the light of the moon, hopping and cavorting between bush and boulder.

Peter gripped my arm. "Gezekas," he muttered. We could hardly breathe with excitement. They were, as we had expected, quite round, covered in soft-looking fur, like a mole's. Their retractable limbs, shooting out like little pistons, gave the charming impression that they were on springs. Their heads and tails popped in and out, too, as they spun over the ground touching-down with bumps and bounces like a rising aeroplane.

At rest they appeared to balance on their tails, the diminutive paws held dangling like a squirrel's on either side of a small puce bib of fur. The rest of the body was blue—near forget-me-not—except for the head, which was dove-grey speckled with vermilion.

And how shall I describe the head, the quaintest part of this quaint animal? It stretched out like a toy giraffe's, combining a dozen enchanting traits: the gentleness of a dove, the cheekiness of a monkey, the pathos of a jerboa. It had the latter's great

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sensitive eyes, shining in the moonlight like sapphires. There was an air, too, of the wistful deer. A little horn collar encircled the base of the neck into which, as far as I could see (for nothing but a camera could have captured that speed), the tiny head sprang at each lightning revolution.

We watched spell-bound. Boco played as we had never heard him play before—quite possessed by the magic scene.

We dared not at this stage risk taking photographs, but by means of signs we drew each other's attention to a promising sight: a fascinating young Gezeka—a mere pup—which was continually straying from the others in his search for juniper berries.

Him we chose as tomorrow's quarry.

It was just possible, I thought, that by clever placing of Boco and his pipe, and the right bait, we might lure that baby Gezeka into a trap.

The end of that strange night was sudden, and, in its manner, confirmed Ghisoni on two important points. We had noticed that if the music stopped the Gezekas cocked their ears and jumped round in our direction. But if an animal made a noise, they lolloped and frolicked as if nothing had happened. When, towards three in the morning, I sneezed, a shudder swept through the group, and in three seconds not a Gezeka was to be seen. It was a panic-stricken exit: a flashing and spinning of little bodies, then stillness where the air had trilled with light laughing barks, and a moonlit loneliness where there had been a meadowful of sport.

The next day things moved quickly: almost too quickly, as you will see. After breakfast we hastened to the scene of the night's adventures and examined the terrain. The first discovery came from Peter. "There's something rum here," he called; "have a look at these droppings." Boco and I hurried over. We stared at the little sheep-like pellets, and crushed them between our fingers. Amazing! Forty miles or so we were from the sea, and yet these things contained minute particles of shell and fish-bone. "Boco," I cried, "where are there fish in this wilderness?" The Corsican, a fisherman born, slowly shook his head:

"These be from no fish I know, *Signore*. Nothing like this was caught in our nets."

"Hang it man," I said—"there must . . ." Then I saw what Peter was staring at, something white in Boco's hand. It was the cleanly-picked skeleton of a fish—but a fish that came from no world we knew.

"I found it here, *Signore*—just at my feet," said Boco proudly. Peter and I threw ourselves on the ground, combing with our fingers the coarse fibrous grass. Three more came to light, about

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the size of sardines—one severely chewed, and all repeating the extraordinary pattern: a spoke-like spiral of transparent bones thrown out from a pearl-white back-bone and ending in a head top-heavy with enormous eye-sockets.

"They *must* come from somewhere," said Peter, with sarcastic enlightenment. "Somewhere in this wilderness there must be fish. A whole lake simply full of them, I expect, round the corner!"

"What about the streams?" I asked. "There's enough of them—at least in winter."

"No, *Signori*, there is no lake and the only fish in these streams are minnows and small trout. And has not the *Signore* noticed that the fishes' skeletons are salt to the taste?"

I turned in my hands that fragile structure of bones, and with the tip of my tongue found indeed that they were salt. I stared into those great vacant eye-sockets. "Confound it," I thought, "those eyes ought to tell us something!" Then it flashed upon me: large eyes, luminous eyes, eyes for seeing in the dark! The Gezekas had such eyes—they had shone in the night like sapphires.

Of course! Somewhere below us must be a nether world—a subterranean lake or river leading to the sea. Could it be that on those shores and banks the playful Gezekas lived their prehistoric life? A shout from Boco:

"Here, *Signori*, here by the three-tiered rock."

We ran over to him and found him with his hand down a hole at the base of the rock. "Look," he cried, "it is not at all what it seems—it goes down as straight as a pine-tree." We thrust our arms down the cavity and found them groping in a stony hollow. Peter threw in a pebble and we heard it hit against the rocks far below.

We hurried back to camp and formed our plans. Ghisoni wrote that he had seen Gezekas greedily digging their snouts into the earth nests of the humble-bee. Accordingly, we patted together little balls of honey and juniper berries and returned to the meadow with nets. Our plan was to lay the snare for the evening.

The afternoon was sultry, and the sun almost hidden behind a steaming sky. Flies swarmed about us like bees: for them, I suppose, it was a perfect day, and they were intoxicated with the smell of the honey. The Halcyon Swallows, which had been flying high since noon, seemed to have stopped their crying. We were surprised and excited.

At the meadow we separated. Boco said it was siesta-time and stretched himself beneath an ash tree, lazily improvising upon his pipe. Peter went off to sprinkle pellets of honey round whatever looked like a hole: and I wandered about asking myself where the deuce to lay the net.

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Five minutes passed. Then I thought I felt a pebble strike me in the back. I swung round and saw Peter acting a frantic dumb-charade. He was a few feet from the three-tiered rock and looked as if he were screaming news against a gale. Then I realized: "The net. The net!" he was pleading with frenzied grimaces. I began to edge my way closer, the nylon net in my hand.

Then I saw what Peter saw; something that sent me giddy with excitement; unexpected and unbelievable, a baby Gezeka was outside the hole and actually hopping his way out farther. Scarcely knowing what I did I flung the net to Peter and pointed to the hole. Peter was quick: with his arm down the hole he deftly arranged the net. The young Gezeka, a little puzzled by the daylight, continued to wander about, picking up with relish the scattered honey balls. I was so close I could see its feet popping in and out of their woolly sockets; they were golden, and webbed like a dabchick's.

Then came Peter's signal and I clapped. The crack rang through the forest sending a pair of pigeons shooting into the sky. The little animal sprang round and bounded towards what it thought was safety. Fatal deception met it. The strings jerked, the net closed, and we were on it like terriers. I pulled and out came a struggling furry bundle bucking and bouncing in every direction, with little limbs hopelessly entangled.

How I cursed when I realised that the syringe and the serum had been left behind! Precious minutes were lost as we ran to the tent. Then Peter ripped off the covering of the serum package, and in a few seconds I had given the injection. The effect was immediate. The animal relaxed, its limbs pulled into the body, its tiny head disappeared with the horny collar, and in three minutes this little firework of a creature had changed into a sleeping ball. Then Boco arrived, and, espying what we had got hold of, he fell on his knees shouting out *Ave Marias* laced with swear words. He was still at it when drops of rain fell—the weather had broken.

Throwing our things together we decided upon an immediate withdrawal, and at three o'clock we began to move off. We had not reached the top of the first ravines when a long sob burst from the woods beneath us. It pursued us all the way up the gullies—poignant and heartrending. I dared not speak. It was the mother Gezeka bewailing the loss of her young.

At ten o'clock that night we were in the train and heading for the coast. All went well till about Carbuccia where our excellent Boco said good-bye, leaving us his reed-pipe. There the first of the crises arose. Peter, who had just peeped into the hamper, seized my sleeve and whispered: "The little blighter's coming to." I snatched up the hamper and hurried into the corridor, Peter following with

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the syringe in his pocket. We reached the W.C. Damn it, someone was in there ! A whole terrible minute went by, then the slot clicked from *Occupé* to *Libre*, and a fat woman issued into the corridor.

We pushed past her and crushed into the toilet like schoolboys about to be sick. I tore off the covering of the hamper. There was the little Gezeka with his head out, blinking like a man who has been knocked unconscious. In a few more seconds I had given the second injection, and we watched with relief the sapphire-blue eyes closing and the faun-like head tucking again into the body.

As we walked back to the compartment Peter, with a worried look on his face, remarked :

" Do you know. I don't quite trust this serum ! Oh, it's doing its job all right, but have you noticed how the breathing's changed, and how the pert little tail has become almost too limp to support the body ? What are we going to do at its next awakening ? "

With forced optimism I tried to persuade Peter that the creature would not need another injection. It was young, and presumably adaptable, and surely by tomorrow it would have become vaguely accustomed to its hamper. Yet secretly I, too, was worried. It was a relief to arrive at Ajaccio, where we passed a fairly peaceful night at the Hotel Napoleon.

Next morning, with cheering crowds thronging the harbour, the gangway was hoisted aboard and the narrow strip of water between the ship and the quay slowly widened as the *Ville d'Ajaccio*, bound for Marseilles, moved away. The Gezeka was sleeping soundly, and Peter and I had left our cabin to enjoy the scenes on deck.

" Peter," I said, " let's have a drink." And we sought out the bar and drank to our success. Then, feeling pleased with ourselves, we sauntered back below decks and unlocked the cabin door. We reeled back with horror. The Gezeka cage was bumping round the room like an animated thing, and squeals of terror came from it. I flung off the cover of the hamper and saw the baby Gezeka whirling round like a Catherine wheel and hurling itself against the sides. " Quick, Peter," I cried, " the syringe." He snatched it up.

The access of light into the cage seemed to still the animal for a moment and it huddled panting in a corner and began to sob. Then Peter saw the patch of vomit on the floor of the basket, and the juniper berries trodden in it.

" Do you know," he said deliberately, " I am sure another injection will kill it."

I answered in a kind of daze, " We can't risk that," and I stood by helpless with the serum in my hand. Then I heard Peter say :

" We shall have to have it stuffed," and suddenly I felt sick with revulsion at what we had done. The moonlit meadow ; the buoyant glee of the playing Gezekas ; their trilling laughter that took one back

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to a mysterious age of innocence : it all came upon me now, overwhelming my senses with regret. We had spoilt it. I swung round upon Peter, flinging the serum out of the porthole.

" Quick," I cried, " every second is precious," remembering that it had taken only fifteen minutes for Ghisoni's adult Gezeka to go mad. " Find me the Vitamin B."

Peter handed me the phial, gaping. I filled the syringe.

" Now the pipe, man," I yelled, " the reed-pipe ; play something, anything—blow down it."

Poor old Peter, who was no musician, literally blew down it with comic lack of enterprise. But the effect of that long drawn-out hesitant note was magical. The little creature lost its terror and was still. I held it down with one hand and inserted the needle under its right leg. I injected—a full dose of the life-giving vitamin.

Then, making fast the corners of the cage with cord, I ran down the corridors of the ship with Peter following, and up on to the quarterdeck. " Now, Peter," I said, " you hold this end while I lower the hamper over the ship's sides." And I handed him two of the ropes. He looked at me questioningly. " Damn it," I cried, " there isn't a moment to lose," and he buckled to.

We lowered the hamper into the sea.

With a hissing splash cage and water met and to my horror the whole thing turned turtle. But the little Gezeka popped up like a cork, and I saw its bewildered look for a moment before the great tidal wake of the ship swept over it. Then I raced to the stern. Had the animal been sucked under ? I waited breathlessly.

We were passing the lovely Golfo de Porto—from whose very shores must issue the Gezekas' subterranean river. There was still nothing. Very sadly I put my hand on the companionway and prepared to go below. A drowned Gezeka ! So that was the end of our adventure !

" Ye gods," bawled Peter, " look over there." I leapt round and followed the direction of his pointing finger. About eight hundred yards from the ship, bobbing through the waves like a tiny gyrating buoy, was our baby Gezeka. It was heading with all certainty towards the mainland. Rapidly I gazed at that satisfying sight.

Then came Peter's voice :

" Confound it, and we never even took a photograph ! "

* * *

It used to be said by men of the world that there were only thirty-four Rembrandts in existence, of which fifty-one were in the U.S.A.

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O MISTRESS MINE!

I do not love a wanton, I do not love a prude.
One is too easy winning, and one too long pursued

RUFINUS, *Second Century*

Said Lord Merton, "A woman wants nothing to recommend her but beauty and good nature; in everything else she is either impertinent or unnatural. For my part, deuce take me, if ever I wish to hear a word of sense from a woman as long as I live."

FANNY BURNEY, *Evelina*, 1778

Lady Of My Delight

She whom I love will sit apart,
And they whom love makes wise
May know the beauty in her heart
By the beauty in her eyes.

Thoughts that in quietness confute
The noisy world are hers,
Like music in a listening lute
Whose strings no finger stirs.

And in her eyes the shadows move,
Not glad nor sad, but strange
With those unchanging dreams that prove
The littleness of change.

GERALD GOULD

Highly Recommended

Glorvina, a very handsome fresh-coloured, black-haired, blue-eyed young lady, who could ride a horse, or play a sonata with any girl out of the County Cork, seemed to be the very person destined to ensure Dobbin's happiness—much more than that poor good little weak-spirited Amelia about whom he used to take on so.

"Look at Glorvina enter a room," Mrs. O'Dowd would say, "and compare her with that poor Mrs. Osborne who couldn't say boo to a goose. She'd be worthy of you Major—you're a quiet man yourself, and want someone to talk for ye. And though she does not come of such good blood as the Malonys or Molloys, let me tell ye,

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she's of an ancient family that any nobleman might be proud to marry into." But before she had come to such a resolution, and determined to subjugate Major Dobbin by her endearments, it must be owned that Glorvina had practised them a good deal elsewhere.

She had had a season in Dublin, and who knows how many in Cork, Killarney, and Mallow? She had flirted with all the marriageable officers whom the depots of her country afforded, and all the bachelor squires who seemed eligible. She had been engaged to be married a half score times in Ireland, besides the clergyman at Bath who used her so ill. She had flirted all the way to Madras with the Captain and chief-mate of the Ramchunder East Indiaman, and had a season at the Presidency with her brother and Mrs. O'Dowd who was staying there, while the Major of the regiment was in command at the station. Everybody admired her there: everybody danced with her: but no one proposed who was worth marrying. One or two exceedingly young subalterns sighed after her, and a beardless civilian or two. But she rejected these as beneath her pretensions and other and younger virgins than Glorvina were married before her.

There are women, and handsome women too, who have this fortune in life.

W. M. THACKERAY, *Vanity Fair*

Fair Enough

Be she mistress of my choice
Clean in manners, clear in voice:
Be she witty more than wise,
Pure enough, though not precise:
Be she showing in her dress
Like a civil wilderness,
That the curious may detect
Order in a sweet neglect:
Be she rolling in her eye,
Tempting all the passers-by
And each ringlet of her hair
An enchantment or a snare,
For to catch the lookers-on,
But herself held fast by none:
Let her Lucrece all day be,
Thais in the night to me:
Be she such as neither will
Famish me nor over-fill.

ROBERT HERRICK

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Feet of Clay

You done well not to 'ave the big girl I will say that for ye. She's a gad-about grinny, she is if ever was. A gad-about grinny. Mucked up my mushroom bed to rights, she did, and I haven't forgot it. Got the feet of a centipede, she 'as—all over everything and neither with your leave nor by your leave. Like a stray 'en in a pea patch. Cluck! cluck! trying to laugh it off. I laughed 'er off I did. Dratted lumpin bag-gage.

H. G. WELLS, *The History of Mr. Polly*

Tea for Two

The soldier loves his rifle
The scholar loves his books
The farmer loves his horses
The film star loves her looks
There's love the whole world over
Wherever you may be
Some lose their rest for gay Mae West
But you're my cup of tea . . .

The blackbird loves the earthworm
The adder loves the sun
The polar bear an iceberg
The elephant a bun
The trout enjoys the river
The whale enjoys the sea
And dogs love most and old lamp-post
But you're my cup of tea.

W. H. AUDEN

Ultimately . . .

I find that, ultimately, there are only two kinds of women, the plain and the coloured. The plain women are very useful. If you want to gain a reputation for respectability, you have merely to take them down to supper. The other women are very charming. They commit one mistake, however. They paint in order to try and look young. Our grandmothers painted in order to try and talk brilliantly. *Rouge* and *esprit* used to go on together. That is all over now. As long as a woman can look ten years younger than her own daughter, she is perfectly satisfied. As for conversation, there are only five women in London worth talking to and two of these can't be admitted into decent society . . .

OSCAR WILDE, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

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MYSTERY AT MR. DE FOE'S

Could a spirit communicate her secret, after two hundred and forty years?

by NEIL BELL

I CANNOT tell the full story of Mary Birch but only some facts which emerged after an investigation that occupied several days of my time and took me on a number of short, pleasant and not unprofitable journeys. These facts I give honestly and as they occurred. I cannot explain them. Nor can I give all the keys which might unlock the heart of the whole matter, for not all the keys came into my possession. The few I failed to find must be taken on faith.

This is, I realize, rather a portentous preamble to what is after all quite a straightforward story. Yet it is a strange story and it would be unfair to the reader to plunge headlong into it without any warning that at the end not all its threads will be completely unravelled.

Perhaps I should add that while I am a publisher of books I am essentially a business man rather than a literary one.

My participation in the affair began about a year ago. It was shortly before five o'clock one early spring afternoon. Miss Grey, my secretary, had brought in half a dozen letters she had just finished typing and stood by me while I signed them. One of the letters, a rather long one, occupied the whole of a quarto sheet of typing paper; I noticed that at the bottom the paper was slightly roughened and faintly smudged, and I asked Miss Grey about it.

I asked with reluctance, for the question seemed to imply fault-finding, and Miss Grey is an admirable secretary to whose initiative and intelligence I owe a great deal. That she was sensible of the implication was only too apparent, for she coloured and looked embarrassed and I mentally cursed myself for being a clumsy fool. What the dickens did the mark matter? It occurred in a letter to one of the most troublesome and pettifogging of my authors and in any case was barely discernible. But it was too late to withdraw the question and so I waited.

"I am sorry," she said, "I had to use the eraser. There were some letters there. I—I don't quite know how they got there." She stopped short, her colour deepening and her manner so em-

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barrassed that I hastened to say, "It's nothing, Brenda; nothing at all. I—er—merely wondered."

"If it had not been so late," she said, "I would have re-typed the letter."

"Oh nonsense," I said with a laugh, "quite unnecessary. And with such a long letter. And with paper at the price it is. Oh dear me, no." I laughed again, finished signing the letters, gave them back to Miss Grey to post on her way home and the incident ended.

I am often told by my wife and other privileged persons that I am a most unobservant man. This at one time used to annoy me for I had always rather prided myself on noticing things; but marriage pricks many egotistical bubbles and I have now come to accept my lack of observation as a fact. Perhaps it is. After all, who should know better than one's wife and her relatives?

And certainly after the trifling incident of the smudged letter I was a long time noticing that anything was the matter with my secretary. I really ought to have noticed, for I am very fond of her in a quite fatherly way and fondness is supposed to lend clarity and sharpness to the perceptions: in which it is like love, despite the proverb that love is blind.

It must have been, then, quite six weeks later that I found myself looking rather fixedly at Miss Grey one afternoon and noticing to my astonishment that she did not look at all well. I asked her if anything were the matter and of course she said no. Some people invariably say no to that question, just as others make it an excuse to launch out on a description of their aches and pains since childhood.

"You don't look at all well," I said; "I hope you're not sickening for something."

"Of course I'm not," she said, "I feel quite well. My room was a little stuffy. I forgot to open the window." She smiled. "I'm afraid I must have dozed off for a few seconds and I always feel horrid if I do that."

I was about to make some jocose remark about its being liver, and that I was a martyr to that wretched organ, when I noticed how wan her smile was, and so I said, "Take the day off tomorrow and run down to the coast and get some ozone."

"And tomorrow's Thursday," she said, "when there are always letters from everyone."

"We'll manage," I said.

"And a nice muddle I should find on Friday," she said and smiled, quite happily and brightly this time. "If I were ill that would make me worse. But I am quite well, really I am."

And so I said no more.

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I suppose one rarely looks closely at people one is constantly with, and so it was more than a week later when I again found myself regarding Miss Grey's very attractive face. But it didn't look at all attractive then, unless a rather pathetic and haggard appearance is attractive. I put down my pen and swivelled my chair half round so that I was facing her.

"Look here, Brenda," I said, "you're not well. I told you so a week ago and now you look worse. You look positively ill. What is the matter with you? And if you say 'Nothing', I shall insist upon your seeing my doctor. And I shall also write to your parents."

"You mean my mother," she said.

"Yes," I said, "of course I meant your mother."

"My mother knows," she said.

"Good Lord, Brenda," I said, "you don't mean to tell me—I mean you're not going to have—"

She interrupted me with a laugh and told me not to be absurd. Perhaps not quite so bluntly as that, but that was what she meant.

"Then what is the matter?" I said. "I insist on knowing. I can't have you haunting my office like the ghost of a dying duck."

That perhaps hurt her. It certainly angered her, as I meant it to do. It's the only way of getting anything out of some people, especially women.

And so she told me. She had been standing up when I spoke but now she drew a chair up nearer to my desk and sat down. "I hope you won't tell me it's all my imagination," she said, "or the workings of my unconscious or something of that sort."

"Is that what your mother says?" I asked.

"Oh no," she said quickly, "quite the contrary. But I know the sort of thing that is said about anything to which there isn't an obvious normal explanation."

"You may depend on my not saying it," I said, "there is nothing I think more silly and futile than the claptrap nowadays about the unconscious and the libido and all the rest of the Freudian ragbag. Please go ahead."

"You will perhaps remember," she said, "that some time ago, it is quite six weeks now, I brought you in, among some other letters for you to sign, one that was slightly marked where I had used the eraser."

"I remember it quite well," I said, "and I was sorry I mentioned it. If I recollect, you said something about there having been some letters on the paper."

"Yes," she said, "there had been some letters; but I did not want to tell you how they got there. It seemed so silly. And—well, I really wasn't altogether sure that was how they had got there.

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"I had finished typing the letter and was moving the paper up in the machine to take it out when I stopped and yawned and felt extraordinarily sleepy. Just for a second or two I closed my eyes. And then I had a very strange and rather frightening feeling. It was as if something was clasping my throat and I was falling asleep. It was not a tight clasp and the sensation was quite pleasant but it somehow rather frightened me and I shook myself awake, or that is how it seemed to me, and opened my eyes.

"I didn't notice anything on the letter for a moment and then, as I took hold of the paper to withdraw it, I did. It was a word typed at the bottom of the sheet. Or that was what I took it to be. It was this." And she took a piece of my memo paper, wrote on it, and handed it to me, I read: *iamun.* I stared at it for a moment and said it aloud several times.

"It's certainly not English," I said. "What did you make of it?"

"Nothing at the time," she said. "I wondered for a moment if I had leaned an elbow on the keys but of course that would not have written anything; it would merely have jammed the type. And in any case the letters are too far apart on the keyboard to be affected by an elbow. I did not know what to make of it, but finally concluded that I must have unconsciously fingered the keys during the moments when my eyes were closed."

"A sort of doodling on the typewriter," I said.

"Yes," she said, "something like that. And so, as there was no time to do the typing over again, I erased the word and brought the letter in to you, hoping you'd notice nothing."

"And I most provokingly did," I said, "and yet my wife tells me I never notice anything. But go on. I'm sure that wasn't the end of it."

"It was only the beginning. A few days later, when I had just inserted a piece of paper to begin a letter, I felt the same odd sleepiness creeping over me, and again I closed my eyes and had that strange sensation of something clasping my throat. And again I shook it off and opened my eyes and found my fingers were resting on the keys." She stopped, drew the piece of memo paper towards her, wrote on it and handed it to me. "That was the word I saw on the sheet of paper," she said.

The word was *iamunderthes*, and I made several attempts to pronounce it, at which she smiled faintly and said, "Don't try to pronounce it. It is not a word but several words run together." She leaned towards me and pointed with her pen. "You see," she said, "it is *I am under the* and then there is an *s*."

"And you wrote that on your typewriter while you were asleep or, well, half asleep."

"I did not write it," she said and hesitated, colouring a little.

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Then she added, " But I think my fingers may have written it."

" You mean typed it."

" Oh yes, of course," she said.

" Please go on," I said.

" It both frightened and excited me, roused my curiosity," she said, " and I thought a good deal about it that evening. But I didn't say anything to my mother about it."

" I thought you told me you had."

" Yes," she said, " but not then. I didn't want to." Again she hesitated and gave an awkward little laugh. " You see mother thinks herself psychic and uses a planchette board and claims to receive messages from the dead. Well, I have always thought that nonsense. I laughed at mother's planchette messages and told her she just wrote them herself. I knew if I told her of what had happened she would immediately declare it was someone from the other side, as she always describes them, trying to communicate; and I just didn't want to be drawn into that sort of discussion, especially as I felt I should have no answer to what I was sure would be her question, ' Well, how *do* you account for it ? ' And so I said nothing to her. But I did think a good deal about it both at the time and for days afterwards.

" At first I decided that if ever again I felt that uncanny sleepiness creeping over me I would resist it. I would not close my eyes, but get up and do something and keep moving about until it passed off. But nothing happened for over a week and I began to feel disappointed and to find my curiosity growing to such a pitch that I reversed my decision and decided that if it did come I would surrender to it. But it did not come and another week went by.

" I even tried pretending I felt sleepy and closing my eyes. But nothing happened. I felt no half-caressing clutch about my throat nor any of that desire to let myself sink into sleep that I had previously experienced."

" So *I am under the s* is all you ever got ? " I said.

" No," she said, " I'm not sure if it would not have been better if it had been; if I had resisted when next the thing came, and got up and walked about and so kept awake. But I suppose it was because I had to wait so long and this made me impatient and added to my curiosity and so, about three weeks after the second experience—"

" That would be about a fortnight ago ? " I interrupted. She nodded and I begged her to go on.

" It was late in the afternoon when it came," she said, " nearly a quarter to five. It had been a very busy day," she smiled, "—it was one of our Thursdays. I was feeling quite fagged out and a little sleepy and as I slipped the paper into my machine to type the last

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letter I yawned and quite suddenly I knew it was coming. And it came. I felt I could not keep awake. Could not keep my eyes open. And now I did not want to. I closed my eyes and felt a delicious drowsiness stealing over me and I felt too that strange, rather frightening yet rather pleasant, soft clutch about my throat. And then I must have gone right off to sleep. It did not last long, only a minute or two by the clock; but when I opened my eyes there was something typed right across the paper and occupying two lines."

"Did you keep the paper?" I asked.

"Yes," she said, "but it is at home. I have a copy in my desk, and another paper on which I have re-typed it as it should read. I'll get them."

She was back in a few moments and handed me a sheet of paper on which was typed: *iamunderthestableatmasterdefoehisgreathouse atnewingtonmarybirch.*

"Wait a moment," I said, "let me see what I can make of it. I am under the—er—the stable, the stable at master, at master, I have it, at master def—now what the dickens does that mean?—at master def—is it deaf?"

Miss Grey laughed. "Master De Foe," she said.

"De Foe," I repeated, "De Foe. Do you mean the Robinson Crusoe man?"

"I think so," she said, "Daniel De Foe. Do you want to go on puzzling it out?"

"You mean you want to show me how clever you've been. Go ahead."

She passed me a second sheet of paper and I read: *I am under the stable at Master De Foe his great house at Newington Mary Birch.*

"And you found that typed on your sheet of paper?" I asked.

She nodded.

"And you've no recollection of how it got there?"

"None at all."

"And you took the paper home?"

"Yes."

"Why did you do that?"

"I wanted to show it to my mother. I was beginning to think—"

"'There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio.' Was that it?" I interrupted.

"Well, yes, perhaps," she said, "and—and well, I wanted to talk it over."

"I was in the next room," I reminded her.

She flushed a little at this and said, "I—I thought you might not believe me. That you might think I was, oh, just being silly."

"I shouldn't have thought anything of the sort," I said, "and

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you ought to have known it. But never mind that now. What did your mother say ? "

" What I expected her to say : that it was a message from the other side. She was very excited about it and consulted, as she calls it, her planchette board and wanted to take me to a friend of hers who is a medium and hold a séance. I wouldn't have anything to do with it and then she said it was wrong of me and that I was refusing to answer an appeal ; and a great deal more ; in fact she became very tiresome about the whole affair, and she is constantly urging me to get help from what she calls the right sources."

" And that is what has been worrying you ? "

" Partly. But I have been rather, well, not worried but concerned about the affair. It does seem all rather mysterious and a little, well, frightening. It doesn't frighten me during the day but sometimes at night when I am lying awake I feel that something might happen and I do get rather scared."

" And did your mother get anything from her planchette ? "

" No."

" And you've done nothing ? "

Miss Grey smiled. " Well, I did go and see the librarian at our public library and asked him if he had any books on De Foe. He'd only got a few of De Foe's things, *Robinson Crusoe* and *Moll Flanders* and one or two others ; but nothing on De Foe."

" You didn't think of coming a little nearer home," I said. Miss Grey looked puzzled and I smiled at her and said, " Our Mr. James Macey."

" I didn't know Mr. Macey had written anything about De Foe," she said.

" He would be terribly hurt," I said, "—he thinks he has written the standard life. It certainly is a good one, and we publish it. I think I'll have a talk with Mr. Macey. Will you ring him and ask if he can lunch with me tomorrow ? If he can, ask him to call here just before one; or say I'll meet him in the lounge of *The Thistle* at one sharp."

Miss Grey returned in a few minutes. She was smiling. " Mr. Macey says he'll be delighted and will meet you at *The Thistle*."

" What are you smiling at ? "

" Mr. Macey said he hoped you were going to make restitution of the money you'd been robbing him of for years," she said.

I laughed. " He seems to be in form. You will note, Miss Grey, how true to type he runs ; the author type—one idea only."

It was not until we were smoking over our coffee that I told Macey of Miss Grey's odd experience and showed him the paper on which she had typed the supposed message : *I am under the*

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stable at Master De Foe his great house at Newington Mary Birch.

He read it through and sat looking at it. Then he glanced up at me: "Do you think Miss Grey may be pulling your leg?"

"I'm sure she's not," I said, "—whatever the explanation is we can rule that out. I'm positive of that."

"You're probably right," he said. "She doesn't seem that sort from the little I've seen of her. And anyway, to concoct that message she would need to know quite a lot about De Foe. By the way, do you know if she has read my book?"

"I shouldn't think so," I said and smiled. "I rather think she's never heard of it."

"Probably," he said, "and I don't suppose you've read it either."

I wasn't to be drawn. "Did De Foe live at Newington," I asked, "and where is Newington?"

"It's Stoke Newington," he said, "but De Foe usually referred to it as Newington. He bought a large house and grounds there in seventeen hundred and ten, I think it was. It was in Church Street. De Foe Road now runs through what was once the garden. Stoke Newington was then a quiet little village and nothing like the London dormitory it is now."

"So that part of it is correct," I said. "Were there stables?"

"There was certainly a stable and several outhouses and about four acres of grounds."

"What about Mary Birch?"

"The name seems to ring a bell but I can't place her," he said.

"You don't mention her in your book?"

"No. I'm sure of that. But when I was writing the life I read everything that's been written about him and all his extant writings." He grinned. "We work for our money, you know."

"We ought to know; you don't forget to tell us. But it should be simple enough to trace this Mary Birch."

"It depends what you mean by simple. De Foe was possibly our most voluminous writer. He lived to be seventy-one and wrote his first work when he was twenty-three, a long tract against the Turks. And for nearly fifty years he wrote year in year out with an almost miraculous fecundity. His known works total nearly three hundred and probably half as many again have never been traced. So when you say the tracking down of Mary Birch should be simple enough I repeat that it depends upon what you mean by simple. I should say it is more like a labour of Hercules. But then I'm not a publisher. However, I'll trot along to the London Library this afternoon and see what I can find. If I draw a blank we'll see what the British Museum can provide. You'll note I'm doing all this gratis."

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" Not a bit of it," I said, " you're as keen as mustard about it and as excited as a schoolboy."

" Intrigued is the word," he said, "—one of those useful words no writer of good English ever uses, according to the critics. And who should know if they don't? I'll run along to the London Library now. Will you be in this afternoon? "

I told him I should, and after I had seen him into his taxi I sauntered back to the office.

He rang up about four o'clock. His voice sounded excited. " By an extraordinary stroke of luck," he said, " I ran her to earth almost at once. I ran through the index of one or two lives without finding anything and then got Crozier's volume of De Foe's letters. There was nothing about Mary Birch in the index but I turned to the letters themselves and to the year when De Foe bought his house at Stoke Newington. I found nothing at first and then slowly turning over the pages I came to this. Are you hearing me plainly? There's a bit of a burr at my end."

" Perfectly," I said, " go ahead."

" O.K," he said, " the letter is to Robert Harley. You can find all about Harley in chapter seven of my book. Ready? Letter begins.

" ' September twentieth, seventeen hundred and ten. Sir, I have but this hour read in the Gazette that you have received most worthily the appointment of Her Most Gracious Majesty's Chancellorship of the Exchequer. It is, Sir, both my duty and my pleasure to offer you my very sincerest and warmest congratulations. If I knew how to guide my pen in more courtly fashion the warmth of my feelings would be the more plain. As to the business which was mentioned in your letter of the third instant I will wait on you as you shall direct.

' My household has been rather troubled at the sudden disappearance of one of our maids, a young country girl from Honiton in Devon, by name Mary Birch. It is now a week that she has not been seen and I have been under the painful duty of acquainting her parents with the mysterious and alarming circumstance. I shall be at Wait's Coffee House in Bell Yard each forenoon of Monday and Tuesday in next week and if that should be possible and convenient for you we could meet there to discuss the business. Interim I am, Sir, your most obedient servant, De Foe, Newington.

" End of letter. It's sprinkled with capital letters and the spelling is early eighteenth century. I've made two copies and I'll post one off to you this afternoon. The plot thickens, don't you think? "

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"I certainly do," I said. "What do you think our next move should be?"

"I think we might hop over to Stoke Newington," he said, "and take a look at De Foe Road. I can't say I remember it. I know the librarian there and he may be able to put us on to something."

"Could you come along tomorrow morning?" I asked. When he said that would suit him I told him I would call for him in my car about ten o'clock.

Stoke Newington was only about twenty minutes' run from Macey's house in Regent's Park. We first went along to look at De Foe Road, a quiet suburban thoroughfare, and then on to the public libary. What we wanted was a map or plan of the village of Stoke Newington in De Foe's time. And once again luck favoured us.

"I'm afraid I've got nothing," the librarian said, addressing Macey, with whom he was apparently on friendly terms, "but it's just possible that Mr. Waterton who keeps the antique shop in Church Street may have something. He's a great De Foe enthusiast and might help you if he's in the right mood. But he's rather a tetchy old fellow."

We went along to see Mr. Waterton and his reception of us was not encouraging. His eyes glinted at us hostilely through thick-lensed glasses and he leaned over his counter and emitted the one word, "Well?" Evidently, I thought, a character.

But as soon as Macey introduced himself as the author of *De Foe and His Times*, the old man's manner changed and he was all affability and helpfulness. And he had precisely what we wanted—a plan of the village in De Foe's time showing very plainly, for the scale was ten inches to the mile, the Church Street of those days and De Foe's big house and grounds. And at the far south-west corner of the grounds was a fair-sized stable. The scent seemed to be getting warm. Could we, we asked Mr. Waterton, borrow the map for half-an-hour or so? He made no difficulty and off we went with the map back to the public library and asked the librarian for the latest government survey map he had of the district. He brought this to us and allowed us to use his office. What we wanted to do, of course, was to find out what today occupied the site of De Foe's stable.

We discovered immediately that the elevation of the ground in De Foe Road was some five feet higher than it had been in De Foe's time. Macey's comment was that we were likely to be in for some good healthy digging and that at least one of us would be none the worse for losing a few pounds.

Our task was rather more difficult than we had anticipated,

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owing chiefly to the old cartographer's itch to show off his artistic skill rather than bother about accuracy; but finally we fixed the site of De Foe's stable as occupying the bottom part of two adjacent back gardens in De Foe Road.

This was a piece of astonishing luck, for the site might have been under any of the houses, and then digging would have been out of the question. Even as it was we had to persuade two people to allow us to dig in their gardens; and knowing something of suburban gardeners' fanatical addiction to their hobby I did not feel very hopeful.

But Macey was optimistic. He was now bubbling over with enthusiasm like a hound hot on a trail. "We'll talk them round," he said, "and if talking fails we'll try something else."

The owner of the first garden made no difficulty. He was indeed all eagerness when we told him something of our quest. He was a reporter on the local paper and snapped his fingers and grinned and said it would be a grand scoop for him. I had to tell him that we couldn't allow anything to be published; and at this he looked so crestfallen that I half relented and said we'd allow him to make a guarded report but I must see what he wrote before it was published. To this he agreed.

"Who's your neighbour?" Macey asked.

The young reporter grinned. "If you're hoping to dig in his garden," he said, "forget it. He exhibits at all the local horticultural shows and he's a holy terror. He's threatened to summons me for allowing weeds to grow. We're not on speaking terms."

Macey laughed. "It's an even chance," he said, "so we won't bother about your neighbour until we've exhausted your garden's possibilities. You won't mind if we dig it all up?"

"Delighted," the young reporter said, "it'll save me a job. I've plenty of forks and spades. They were left here by a former tenant who died suddenly."

"We may have to go down about ten feet," Macey said. "The ground is about five feet higher than it was two hundred years ago. It's going to be tough and will play hell with our hands."

I suggested we got some men in; but Macey pointed out, quite rightly, that there were no able-bodied men out of a job these days and we didn't want the other sort. The young reporter did not, for some reason, seem to relish the idea of getting anyone in, and said that he was pretty good at digging, having, as he put it, spent most of his time during the war digging foxholes and crouching in them. So we all took off our jackets and set to work.

It was then about a quarter to twelve and we knocked off at half past one for a quick luncheon at a nearby pub and resumed work just after two.

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Shortly after four o'clock, when I was in a pretty sorry state with blistered hands and an agonising back, and quite literally running with sweat, Macey shouted out, in a voice breathless yet high with excitement, " I've got something. It's a rib, I think. My spade smashed it."

Within half an hour we had unearthed the complete skeleton of what was either a small man or a woman. None of us had sufficient anatomical knowledge to decide, but later examination by a medical man showed it was the skeleton of a quite young woman. The doctor was unable to give more than a rough estimate as to how long it had been there. The heavy clay soil had completely preserved it and he said that it might have been there well over a hundred years.

" Even as much as two hundred ? " I asked him.

" Possibly," he said, " I wouldn't rule it out."

The young reporter got his scoop but Macey and I kept to ourselves Miss Grey's extraordinary share in the business.

Macey called at my office the next day and we discussed the affair, Miss Grey being, of course, present.

" We'll assume," Macey began, " that the skeleton may be that of Mary Birch."

" Isn't it now something more than hypothesis ? " Miss Grey said quietly.

" Or a coincidence," Macey said.

" No," I said, " I refuse to believe in a coincidence so staggering. I believe it is the skeleton of Mary Birch."

" You appreciate what you're committing yourself to ? " Macey said.

" Have you another explanation ? " I asked.

" No," he said, " but I'd like to know something more about Mary Birch. Did De Foe, for example, ever mention her disappearance again ? I must find that out and it means the devil of a lot of grubbing."

" What is plain," Miss Grey said, " is that someone killed her and buried her under the stable floor. And I think she was strangled."

Macey bit his fingers and frowned. " You mean because of the sensation you had of a clutch at your throat ? But that's all assuming something I won't admit. I simply don't believe in the claims of the spiritualists."

" Can you suggest anything else as a reasonable explanation ? " Miss Grey said.

" I can't," he said, " but I propose to spend the next week or so at the London Library and the B.M."

" And I propose to take a run down to Honiton," I said.

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" Would you care to postpone your grubbing and come with me ? "

" No," he said, " I don't think you'll get anything at Honiton and I'm pretty sure I shall at my end."

And so on the following day I went down to Honiton alone. What I wanted to do was to consult the parish registers and to see if there was any record of Mary Birch.

I left London shortly after eight o'clock and was in Honiton in time for a late-ish luncheon at the *Dolphin*. Afterwards I went to look at St. Paul's Church, which was a disappointment, for it was ugly and obviously Victorian. I called on the Vicar and he told me St. Paul's had been built in 1835. He said very frankly, " It is an unsightly building. Now the old church, of St. Michael, was lovely. It was built in 1480 and burnt down in 1911 ; and unfortunately some of the parish registers and many muniments and other documents were destroyed. I cannot tell you off-hand what was saved. But if you will tell me what you are looking for we'll go into my study where I keep the old parish registers."

I told him that I was anxious to trace a young woman named Mary Birch who was probably born round about 1690.

He smiled. " Well," he said, leading the way up to his room, " it's a Honiton name. We've quite a number of Birches. A good augury, perhaps. We will see."

And presently, and in fact within ten minutes, we did see ; for he found the parish register for the year 1691 and on October the fifteenth there was an entry of the baptism of Mary, daughter of Thomas and Ellen Birch. Thomas was named as a labourer.

" Ellen, the wife, would of course have been a lace maker," the vicar said, "—all the women of Honiton were in those days ; and that was why the town was so prosperous. It was all pillow lace which had been introduced from Flanders during Elizabeth's reign. Pillow lace was then all made on a pillow with bobbins. There would be as many as a dozen bobbins in use at a time and with a rapid worker the bobbins would fly about and rattle together. There are women here even today who still make pillow lace with these wooden bobbins and they are astonishingly quick. The sound as they work is just like someone using a typewriter."

I was startled into exclaiming abruptly, " What did you say ? " And at his look of surprise I apologised and said, " I found your analogy a little—er—well, extraordinary."

" Indeed," he said, " but it is precisely what it does sound like." He then showed me several pictures of women at work making the pillow lace and said that if I were particularly interested he would arrange for me to see a local woman at work.

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But I had found out all I wanted and was anxious to get back to London that day.

And that really is the end of this rather inexplicable affair. Macey found no further mention of the unhappy Mary Birch anywhere in De Foe's works.

It comes to this. Two hundred and forty years after her death Mary Birch was able to transmit through Miss Grey, and by means of a typewriter, exact information regarding the whereabouts of her skeleton. If that is not true, then I do not know what other explanation there is.

Two points puzzled me: if Mary Birch could communicate so much why not a little more and tell us how she came by her death? And why did she not know that the house in which De Foe had lived no longer existed?

I put these two points to a well-known investigator of psychic phenomena and he said this: "Disembodied spirits can only rarely get through and then only for the briefest of periods. They have not the strength or power to make anything but short and often quite unintelligible communications. And Mary Birch would not know what had happened to the houses of her earth life because disembodied spirits can never come back to this plane to see for themselves. They can communicate but they cannot come. All stories of spirits appearing at séances are untrue and ghosts and phantasms are merely an hallucination of the person or persons seeing them."

That is the view of the expert. It leaves my story as I said, when I began, that it would have to be left: with not all its threads completely unravelled and certainly with some pieces not tucked tidily in.

* * *

ONCE BITTEN . . .

A reindeer walked into a public house and ordered a whisky and soda.

The barman served him. The reindeer planked down a ten-shilling note on the counter and the barman gave him six and sixpence change.

"Pardon me," said the barman, "I hope you don't mind my mentioning it but it's sort of interesting. I don't think we've ever seen a reindeer in here before."

"No," said the reindeer indignantly, as he pocketed his change, "and you're not likely to see another—not at these prices."

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TAMING OF AUNT LIL

My Uncle Henry had been the sort who got pushed around—once

by DAL STIVENS

ONE of my earliest memories as a nipper is of Uncle Henry's old celluloid collar, stuck high up on a nail on one of the posts of the front verandah. The collar was fly-spotted, had cracked with the sun and looked as though it had been there for years.

It had, too.

Uncle Henry had put it there the day he and Aunt Lil came back after their honeymoon. I wasn't born then but I can see it all clearly: the day, hot; Uncle Henry sweating, and his neck rubbed raw by the celluloid collar Aunt Lil had made him wear all the time they were in Sydney. (She made him wear blue pyjamas, too: imagine a bush bloke wearing blue pyjamas). They got out of the sulky at the house and Uncle ripped the collar off with both hands, not waiting to undo the studs. Then he climbed up on a chair and jammed it on the nail.

It stayed there for forty years until Uncle died and one of my cousins sold the farm.

Uncle liked to see it there, I think. It meant something to him. He had a tough time getting Aunt Lil, and until the day he tore the collar off she had pushed him around, and so had everyone else.

They told me you never saw a man change like Uncle Henry did after he got married. He put his foot down with Aunt Lil and everyone else, and they all liked it.

He had us all scared when we were kids and we were never game to shin up the verandah post to get that collar. We wanted to, of course.

"I'll warm your pants for you, young shaver, if you touch that dang collar," he'd warn me, the ends of his long black moustache shaking. "The collar stays there, young fellow-me-lad."

It was a long courtship. Poor Uncle Henry! Every Sunday afternoon he'd get into a hot blue serge suit and hitch up the sulky to drive the fifteen miles through the Mallee to Aunt Lil's parents' place for tea.

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He'd get down from the sulky and flick the dust off his tan boots with a handkerchief and go into the drawing-room with the wax fruit under glass and the oil paintings of Scottish scenes Aunt Lil had copied from coloured postcards.

Aunt Lil had many admirers and there was sure to be about six of them in the drawing-room, all in blue serge suits, holding the best china cups tightly in big hands and being careful not to spill a crumb on the carpet.

Uncle Henry would sit there hardly saying a word except to say he would when Aunt Lil wanted something done, such as fetching another chair.

Next to Aunt Lil, Uncle liked football and he didn't get much better treatment there. He wasn't a good player and he was never picked for the team but he'd travel miles to all the matches round about, just in the hope that someone wouldn't be able to play at the last minute and he'd be asked to play if they could find no one else.

In those days in the Mallee before they got the latest city ideas, they played Rules football in long pants that reached below the knee.

Anyway, it seems that one day when the team was playing away from home Uncle did get a chance to play.

Some bloke's cow was calving and he sent word that he couldn't turn out.

Uncle was pleased and then he found for once he hadn't brought his togs. He went round asking everyone, but no one had a spare pair and by this time the stores were shut.

Then he had an idea and says to Paddy Nolan the captain: "Do you reckon I could play in my underpants?"

Uncle wore long woollen underpants.

Paddy didn't think much of the idea because, as he pointed out, there would be ladies present, and Uncle saw the point. By this time Uncle Henry was getting pretty desperate, particularly as he knew that Aunt Lil would be along and she had promised to go out walking with him after the next match she came to.

Everyone but Uncle Henry thought it a great joke although they wanted to have a full team.

In the end Uncle asked Paddy to come into the pub yard with him and says:

"Now, you keep watch to see no ladies come."

Then Uncle slipped his braces off his shoulders, and walked over to the woodheap and picked up the axe.

"What's the idea?" Paddy asked.

"You'll see," Uncle says and he took his pants off and put them on the block and lopped a foot off each end with the axe. He wore the pants in the match and everyone laughed but said it was clever of him.

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That evening Aunt Lil refused to go out with him with cut-off pants.

No doubt about it, Uncle Henry got pushed around in those days.

It was funny, though, how Aunt Lil came to marry him. Maybe she had come to like him around and the thing that happened at the picnic helped her to make up her mind.

There was no mixed bathing in those days in the bush. The men went in at one bend of the river without costumes and the girls went in at another about a quarter of a mile apart—in petticoats or old flannel night-dresses they kept for the swimming.

The day of the picnic was hot and after lunch they went swimming.

After a time there were yells for help from the women's part of the river because Aunt Lil had got out of her depth.

The men dashed for their clothes—all except Uncle Henry, who for once was first off the mark. Uncle grabs a towel, wraps it round him, and races like mad towards the yells.

As he gets there, the towel comes off, but Uncle doesn't stop, and as he goes down the bank, Aunt Lil's mother whams him across the tail with her umbrella and yells: "Go it, Henry! Go it, Henry!"

Anyway, he saved Aunt Lil and afterwards some old women said that as Aunt Lil had seen Uncle the way he was, the proper thing was for them to marry.

Whether it had anything to do with it or not, Aunt Lil never let on, but anyway she decided to marry him and afterwards, as you know, Uncle Henry never looked back. He put his foot down hard and when he yelled for his slippers as he came in from work on the farm in the evening she always brought them.

* * *

SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD on page 144

Across. 5, Alpaca. 8, Flatfish. 9, Ampère. 10, Man-eater. 11, Temporal. 12, Weal. 14, See. 15, Arrest. 16, Relieved. 19, Damascus. 23, Chance. 26, Oak. 27, Read. 28, Doggerel. 29, Dead-head. 31, Copied. 32, Unafraid. 33, Cypher.

Down. 1, Bloater. 2, Steeple. 3, Hint. 4, Charter. 5, Alarm clock. 6, Papoose. 7, Corkage. 12, Ward. 13, Arum. 14, Stock-rider. 17, Vane. 18, Deed. 20, Apology. 21, Anguish. 22, Sold out. 24, Archery. 25, Cap-à-pie. 30, Ajar.

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Time of Roses

SINCE human beings and animals must eat, the provender of the fields seems normal. The fields of hay and grain and the kitchen gardens look handsome and give us a feeling of security. But the fecund womb of nature not only provides food at this time of year but also blesses the earth with beauty. Out of the damp soil come delicate flower textures and splendours. Wave after wave of brilliant colour sweeps across the meadows and pastures. Six weeks ago the cinquefoil made a yellow bed under the green grass. Then came the hawkweed that banked the hills with gold. Now the buttercups and the daisies sprinkle the green fields with yellow and white . . . and the roadsides bear white fleabane, meadow-rue and sweet clover. The milkweed, a coarse plant, is in bloom and perfumes the summer air extravagantly. The colours throughout the countryside represent the abundance and ecstasy of creation. As lovers are transfigured by happiness, so the fields today are transfigured by the joy of creation.

In the spruce wood the wild rose returns the daily greeting of the sun with scattered pink blossoms. The rose garden beside the house does better than that. After centuries of cultivation throughout the world the rose is the queen of flowers—soft and lustrous in texture, gorgeously coloured in myriad shades and patterns. None of the wild roses can equal the abundance and glory of those that have been cultivated. After the middle of June comes a daily burst of rich blossoms, and some of the plants continue blooming until the snow settles on them.

Cultivated roses have been an ornament of civilization for centuries. Dried roses have been found in the tombs of Egyptian Kings. The word " rose " is international. It is also the symbol of all that is loveliest—to " gather roses " is to seek pleasure ; a " bed of roses " represents ease and luxury ; a " rose without a thorn " represents impossible happiness, an ideal that cannot be achieved. We bring roses to all the major ceremonies of life—weddings, anniversaries, funerals. In their grace, softness, colour and fragrance they are the finest tokens we can give when words seem foolish and trifling. Although they can be cultivated and bred, they cannot be created. They stand as close to immortality as anything we know or can touch.

BROOKS ATKINSON, *Once Around the Sun*

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★An ARGOSY Short Complete Novel

THE DELICATE NATURE

"O Kekasih! O loved one!" she called as she ran in a flutter of laughter

by H. E. BATES

CAPTAIN CUSTANCE, standing on the bridge of the schooner *Roselay* as she swung in from seaward to enter the river mouth through what seemed to be two walls of excavated carmine mud decorated by fantastic clumps of grey sea-skinned tree roots, remarked in a brittle Newcastle accent that "in a couple of minutes she would be grinding and grunting like a bloody factory."

The swing of the *Roselay* to seaward had taken her wide and at right angles to the brilliant green and carmine barrier of coast; and now, as Captain Custance called down the engine tube for full ahead, she seemed to leap forward in a clumsy and shuddering charge, thrashing into the curdling sand-brown current of disgorging stream. And in two minutes, as Captain Custance said, she was grinding up between the walls of forest roots like a long lump of floating factory.

Below there was a guttural wrenching of all her moving parts and above, from a high iron smoke stack, a long curling flag of cloud that melted sulphur-bronze against the sun. Through her decks Simpson could feel her convulsive thunder on the soles of his feet, as if somewhere below him giant presses were hammering out continuous patterns through two-inch steel.

"You'll be there in three hours," Captain Custance said. "And this is"—he pointed to the shores—"about all you'll see—this forest stuff—until you get there." The high old-fashioned bridge seemed to pitch forward, like a crazy cage, suspending itself out over the bows of the *Roselay* as she cut through rich brown waters. "The river's high this week. More muck than ever coming down."

The face of Captain Custance had been coloured a mixture of bright yellow and bark-like brown by tropical sun, and it reminded Simpson, in its cross pattern of cracks and fissures, of a battered pineapple.

"Not here during the war, you said?"

"No."

"Well: the country's changed a lot. A lot to be done. When did you say the great Malan was to be back?"

"In three weeks. Probably a month," Simpson said.

"That'll give you time to settle down," Captain Custance said. "It used to be a fine estate up there. Rubber and pineapple. Then

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they went mad to grub every pineapple in the peninsula and plant rubber. And then rubber went down until it wasn't worth a dog's hair. And then the war. And then the troubles. I daresay it's a bit rough up there with one thing and another—but it'll come back. I'm glad they're opening it up."

Captain Custance, inspired perhaps by the presence of an only passenger, hardly ever closed his mouth. Even when not speaking he could not keep his lips still. He addressed the river before him with a series of preparations for spitting that never quite came off.

"So you don't know the great Malan?"

Under the double wall of forest the air was clotted and terribly humid, paralysing, withering after the clearer heat of open sea. Sometimes, ahead, at a deeper bend of the stream, Simpson could see the flooding waters cut in at an angle against the brilliant forest banks, raising the smallest surface clouds of spray. It gave the impression, from that distance, seen against shadow, that the river was steaming under heat and sun.

It was now hardly necessary to think of an answer to any questions about the great Malan. Sooner or later Captain Custance would answer them for him. He was anxious too, as he had been anxious down in Singapore during three days of waiting there, not to put a foot wrong, not to do anything to jeopardize his chances.

Already Malan had the beginnings of legendary shape about him. That was bad enough. But what he wanted to avoid as much as that, if not more, was to give away any suggestion that would determine the shape of himself. It was too early; he was very keen, perhaps too keen, to make an impression; he was young and raw and he felt, as he talked to Captain Custance, very green.

"He's an old hand," Captain Custance said. "Well, I say old—you know the way I mean. Old in the game is what I mean. Came out young before the war. Went back when it started. I suppose he wouldn't be older than you when I brought him up here for the first time and I brought him a time or two after that. Probably about forty now."

A small brass bell, rung from the top of the companionway by the brown hand of a Malay, called Simpson down a moment later, the only passenger, to a lunch of what turned out to be greasy chicken, surrounded by brown rice, in the quaking, shuddering, stifling confinement of the little saloon.

Captain Custance called after him to be excused. You never knew what muck there might be coming down. The trip before last there had been a floating tree as big as a church steeple that had nearly done his bows in.

"Have a sleep down there in my bunk," he called. "The boy will show you where it is. There's nothing to see up here—not a bloody thing till I land you." The flattened pineapple appearance of the face was heightened, as Simpson saw it, from the deck below. "I got a picture of the great Malan I'll show you too—if I can rake it up."

After the chicken a slice or two of pineapple, unsugared, cut

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thinly, fresh and delicious, quenched a thirst made unbearable by the heat of the small saloon and a not altogether faint suggestion that the rice had been cooked in engine oil.

Simpson was glad to lie down. In the captain's bunk he stripped down to his shirt and lay in a stupefying sweat, listening to the throbbing shudders of the *Roselay* climbing against the stream. He tried to sleep, but some time later a Malay steward brought him a cup of scalding coffee, waking him from a doze. He drank the coffee, when it cooled, purely for thirst's sake and then lay thinking, suddenly lonely, of Singapore.

There had been two very nice fellows, Ford and Harrison, men of his own age, in Singapore. For three days and nights they had gone out of their way to be nice to him, stinting nothing, giving him little tips on this and that, talking with airy reassurance of the up-river station, telling him what a simple, sweet assignment, for a new man, it was. They had agreed, over and over again, that he was marvellously lucky—" nobody to worry you, old boy. Your own boss. Back here in a month—six weeks at the outside. All you've got to do is wait for Malan."

They were very nice fellows ; he would miss them very much. He felt loneliness, dry and vacant, consume the pleasant recollections. Even under gin he had omitted to disclose to those two nice fellows that he had not the vaguest idea what a rubber tree looked like ; or whether pineapples grew, like coconuts, on a tree, or simply by the grace of God.

HE slept a little after that, in a sweating, shuddering drowse, and Captain Custance woke him about four o'clock.

" I'll be putting you down in ten minutes," he said. " One of the boys'll get your kit. You think you got everything you need ? "

" I think so."

" Got chlorodyne ? You'll need chlorodyne if your guts go wrong."

" No."

" You'd better have chlorodyne. I'll give you some from the chest. And if you need anything brought up remember I'll be coming down-river Thursday about midday, and up again the Monday after."

Captain Custance went on deck and Simpson dressed and followed him. He stood for a moment or two dazzled and drugged by a clash of white sunlight that descended with the stunning flatness of a board. He felt the crown of his head ache with the descending thump of it. His vision groped and receded and gradually steadied itself.

He walked up to join Captain Custance on the bridge and from there, poised on the quaking high-suspended cage, he caught his first sight of the Company's landing-stage, the waterfront. It seemed to consist simply of the timber of three packing cases nailed above a dozen jetty piles reinforced by a chain of cracking motor tyres.

Captain Custance, calling down the tube for slow ahead, did not seem to be interested in the desolation of this small deserted quay with its leaden glare of corrugated roofs.

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"Nobody about," Captain Custance said. "There ought to be a boy or two. Need waking up."

He yelled down the speaking tube. From the funnel, in answer, came three blasts, short, sizzling and booming, of the *Roselay*'s whistle. Sound and echo and sound and re-echo chased each other over forest and river in queer bloated jumps, uncanny and hollow, but from the jetty there was no movement, no sound at all in answer.

"The bungalow's back there," Captain Custance said. He pointed to vague recessions of reddish dust—once, Simpson later discovered, the main central road of the whole estate—penetrating the final corner of forest. "Used to be there. I stopped off a time or two with the great Malan to have a drink."

The landing-stage remained deserted. A glare of corrugated roofs, through one of which a tree had grown up and turned back a triangle of iron as neat as a segment cut from a pie, flashed back to Captain Custance and Simpson all the answer they were to get from another blast on the whistle. Some seconds later the *Roselay* hit the rubber tyres, bouncing back, churning to rest, and in that moment Captain Custance remembered the photograph of Malan.

"He left it in the cabin one day—always meant to give it back to him. Then the war came." He held the picture out to Simpson, yelling incomprehensibly to the Malay crew letting down the gangway; and then suddenly the engines stopped and with them, at last, all the thunderous quaking of decks that had convulsed and rattled the soles of Simpson's feet for the last four hours.

In that queer stillness and silence he was so surprised to find himself immobile at last, instead of jigging like an imbecile, that he forgot the photograph.

Captain Custance's stubby forefinger, pointing, reminded him of it and he looked down.

"That was soon after he first came out. In 'thirty-five."

Simpson stared vaguely at a picture, the background for which seemed to be an English suburban back-garden with a swing on a tree, of a young man in riding breeches—a tall, robust, angular man, with a girl in a tennis frock at his side.

"That's the girl he was going to bring out," Captain Custance said. "But it never came off. Too delicate or something. Don't look above seventeen or eighteen there, does she? He told me once she'd never stand the climate, not with her delicate nature."

Simpson stared away from the photograph to where, on the deserted jetty, the Malay boys were piling his bags; his bed-roll and his rifle case in a careless heap like junk; and he suddenly yelled: "Hi! Be careful with that rifle! Don't sling it about like that—"

The boys took not the slightest notice and Captain Custance lifted his brittle Newcastle voice to shout in Malay. A pretence of piling Simpson's bags more neatly followed at once, and Captain Custance said: "You better begin to learn Malay. It's easy enough. No grammar to bother with. Just phrases—you'll pick it up like steam-o."

Uncomfortably Simpson remembered the Malay-English phrase

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book, bought in a Singapore bazaar, with which he hoped to conquer everything, and at the same time he handed back the photograph to Captain Custance.

"No, keep it," the Captain said. "No good to me. You can give it back to Malan. He's probably had fifty like her since then if I know him. She looks a bit delicate, don't she? The funny thing is the climate isn't bad. Same all the year round, more or less—it isn't bad. Keep the photo anyway."

"Thanks," Simpson said. "Well, I'd better say good-bye."

"Good-bye, young fellow," Captain Custance said. "Give the picture with my best compliments to the great Malan." He broadened the crusty ridges of his yellow-brown face into a taut smile. "Interesting to see what he says."

"All right." Simpson shook hands, suddenly liking the broad garrulous Custance far too much, not wanting to go. "I might see you as you go back."

"I'll toot you on the whistle," the Captain said. "And if you want anything be here—Thursday midday."

As he went down the gangway and stood beside his baggage on the landing-stage he told himself that he would not turn, at any rate until the last, least painful moment, to wave good-bye, but the scream of the *Roselay*'s whistle startled him violently and before he could prevent it he was staring up at the receding ship, already churning fast away from the jetty like a flat smoking factory, with Captain Custance beaming fierily, an unbearably friendly figure in white cap and ducks, caught like a flapping bird on the high cage-like bridge as he waved good-bye.

HE picked up his rifle case and slung it over his shoulder and walked up what had once been the road, leaving his baggage on the quay. A horrible thrust of nausea, sharp, almost caustic, a sensation of being alone on the edge of a continent, penetrated violently his whole body, seeming to drain the blood away. He heard a final blast from the *Roselay*'s whistle exploring—as if it were really for him, to make sure that there was no kind of barrier to stop the cut of sound and echo and re-echo in the surrounding infinite emptiness—the roof of forest on either side of the river, losing itself finally in the blue-dusty line of hills.

The silence afterwards brought on him something worse than a mere nausea of loneliness—successive waves of panic, a conviction that there really was no one there among the deserted office shacks, not even a bandit. Dismally, at the same moment, he remembered that Captain Custance had forgotten the chlorodyne.

Into all his other sensations were driven briefly bitter notions of being abandoned and cheated.

Abruptly everything was dispelled by the appearance, up the road, of a turbaned, bearded figure bringing with it its own hasty cloud of dust.

It raced towards him on a bicycle.

As it alighted he had sense enough to see that it was almost as

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remote from a Malay as he was himself. The big black Sikh eyes, the genial barbaric Sikh smile flashed between beard and moustaches, a sort of happily brandished gesture of both hands as they slung the bicycle into the dust—every suspicion of foreignness was confirmed a moment later by a flood of speech in what, he thought, were three languages.

English was not among them. It was lucky, he thought, that a combination of geniality and barbarism in the Sikh temperament understood the importance of a smile. The black facial bear-skin broke into repeated arcs of delighted, almost merry whiteness. Overcome too, he shook hands, and the Sikh saluted.

"English, English?" Simpson said. "You speak English?".

"No, no, no."

"Good God. Nothing? No English?"

"No, no, no," and with it the smiling half-shake, half-nod that could, as he discovered afterwards, mean anything.

He held down his despair. For another second or two the Sikh, taller than himself by some inches, stood grinning down. Simpson went through a few pantomimic, rather exaggerated gestures of washing his hands. The Sikh understood them and broke into cries, pointing down the road.

A few minutes later Simpson was at the bungalow. It was actually, he saw with delight, of brick, with the framework of windows and doors in teak and a roof at least of sun-proof palm. There was a long, shaded verandah, piled up now with neglected and punctured sacks of fertilizer put there under cover from rain.

As the Sikh showed him all this with pride, unlocking the door with a little ceremonious fling of his hands, the fertilizer stank, stale and low and insistent, in the heat of the afternoon.

"Sahib, Sahib, Sahib," the Sikh kept saying, bowing repeatedly; and Simpson walked into the bungalow, into a shrouded world of teak and wicker and wooden chests, the rattan blinds down against the sun.

Familiar though it was, almost too precisely in colonial key, it struck him with an effect of amazing unreality. There was even an English fireplace, built of brick, with mantelpiece of fumed oak colour, the bricks raddled scrupulously, and down on the hearth, like a strayed wedding present, one of those sets of glinting oxidized accoutrements for brushing up dust and cinders. He wondered if Malan had built it: if perhaps this masterpiece, this piece of provincial monumental, were a key to Malan. He wandered about, opening doors, peering about him and returning always to the Sikh, who watched him with delight and friendly pride.

"Wash?" he said at last. "Wash?" and again made the pantomimic exaggerated gesture with his hands.

When the Sikh took him through the kitchen it began gradually to appear that Malan had had something of a genius for creating comfort for himself by improvisation. A shower, operated by ingenious treadle devices from outside, worked excellently, he afterwards found, over the cool concrete slab of bath floor. The Sikh brought him towels and he washed his hands.

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In the kitchen there were devices, like old-fashioned boot cleaners, for dusting shoes. Neat racks kept a great paraphernalia of crockery and cutlery in rigid order. A piece of beautiful ingenuity, in the sitting room, made it unnecessary for anyone sitting down some distance from the window to go through the tiresome necessity of getting up in order to pull the rattan blind. By an arrangement of cords, clever but not at all complicated, the sitter could work the blind. "Malan?" he said. "Malan Sahib?" and the Sikh bowed with unexpected gravity.

There was one other room. The Company had put it down, originally, as a billiard room: a solacing piece of civilization for men cut off from the gaieties of Singapore.

The Sikh let up the rattan blind. Light revealed that the billiard table was still there: but covered now, Simpson saw, with boarding. And there, on the boarding, laid out with an efficiency almost terrifying, almost beautiful, was a model railway.

He stood looking at it: a pattern of complicated steel, of elliptical crossing-veins, of bridges and signalling systems, trucks and sidings, gradients and stations, crack expresses. An infinite number of gadgets, he discovered later, were concealed about it like tricks. It was governed, always, without fail, by an astonishing, maddening fluency.

When he saw that it worked by electricity he put his finger on the switch. Nothing happened; and the Sikh cried his one word of English, "No, no, no," high-pitched, almost mocking, pointing to the dead arc light above the billiard table, shaking his head.

Next morning, just beyond the verandah, Simpson found the generator that would give light to the house and power to the magnificent Malan-made toy. Meanwhile he was to exist, apparently, by oil lamps. He took a last incredulous look at the Malan-made world of trucks and sidings and grinning, said to the Sikh: "Malan?" And then the natural unthinking echo of Captain Custance: "The great Malan?"

In return, once again, the Sikh had nothing to offer, even in mockery, by way of a smile.

This lack of the customary geniality every time he mentioned the name of Malan was repeated several times that evening before he dropped, tired out but no longer lonely or even uneasy, into bed. His brain was too drugged and exhausted to search for any kind of reason for it. It did not trouble him. He was even, in a desultory kind of way, slightly amused. He was troubled only by the low faintly poisonous fumes of the fertilizer outside. It had something curiously carnal and rank about it, penetrating everywhere. He resolved to get the Sikh to move it as soon as he could.

Just before rolling over to sleep, while the small oil lamp was still alight at his bedside, he remembered the photograph of Malan and the girl. He sat up for some time under the mosquito net, looking at it.

The girl, in her white tennis frock, with her dark eyes set with engaging and minute precision at the camera, her pretty dark hair and her delicate nature—she had a slender and almost ephemeral fragility, he thought, not sick, but so very young and so physically

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light and strange—attracted him at once much more than Malan. He thought Malan looked, in the conventional riding breeches and checkered cap and waistcoat, like a dummy snugly stuffed with the straw of a terrible ordinariness. He sported what seemed to Simpson to be a curled moustache. A feeling of airy and intolerable pride—whether for himself or for the girl Simpson could not tell—flooded the entire picture.

Simpson gazed at it a little longer, wondering what sort of woman Malan was going to bring out with him this time. What was it that Captain Custance had said—forty or fifty of them since this one? In the excitement and exhaustion and the momentary loneliness of the trip up the river he had forgotten that Malan had gone home, to England, for that special purpose. Within a month he would be bringing Mrs. Malan back with him.

And Simpson, going to sleep with a jumble of crossing impressions that included the model train, the girl in the tennis frock and the taste of pineapple in Captain Custance's appalling little saloon, decided that to give the photograph back to Malan would not, after all, be politic.

At least, not yet.

NEXT morning the Sikh—he thought it would be much easier and more friendly to call him George—served him the first half of many pineapples, succeeded by several small fried eggs, for breakfast. The pineapple was ripe and delicious, without a tang of that sharp and wasping acid you experienced with pineapples at home, and he enjoyed it so much that he ordered the other half.

After breakfast he and the Sikh toured what was left of the estate on bicycles. An exquisite early morning, blue and powdery, gave way to a stunning heat.

The bicycle on which he rode belonged, inevitably, to Malan. It was fitted with a number of neat and silvery gadgets which included a barometer and, strangely, a mirror in which traffic, if there had been any, could be seen approaching from behind. He felt he would not have been at all surprised if a radio had been concealed in the handlebars or a refrigerating device under the saddle. There was in fact a special receptacle, with tube, from which you could drink thermos-cooled water as you rode along, without the disagreeable business of alighting.

Dust covered with a delicate carmine bloom his shirt, his knees, his hair and all the glittering parts, soon too hot to touch, of Malan's remarkable bicycle; and whenever he stopped sun beat venomously on the top of his skull while George, in a high flow of Malay, talked to him, as he afterwards discovered, on the eternal indestructibility of pineapples. The pineapple, it seemed, was something you could not kill.

But that first morning he did not know this; and when the Sikh slashed with his long knife at a pineapple and halved it and rather contemptuously invited him to bury his face in it he was very glad to do so.

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It refreshed him wonderfully. The Sikh threw the rest of the fruit to the ground and then delivered, in a series of furious slashings of the knife, several attacks on surrounding pineapples, slicing off cactus-like heads and kicking them about in the dust.

It was borne quietly in on Simpson that the pineapple was not only indestructible but not wanted. It ramped about him everywhere, with cactus-like strength, like a gross and not-to-be-discouraged weed; but it was not until he came by, ten days later, and saw the slashed grey-green pineapple tops already rooting in the dust, like claws, that he realized the proper significance of the Sikh's private battle with a fruit that he himself, up to that time, still quite enjoyed.

In due course it would be the job of Malan, with himself as assistant, to destroy any pineapple in the place and restore the estate to rubber. Already, on the wall of the bungalow sitting-room—in the so-called offices, by the quay, the Sikh was still keeping chickens—Malan's map of the new estate, all pink and green and blue, correctly and admirably contoured, a gem of neatness, was hanging for him to see.

Meanwhile the Sikh and he, quite alone on the actual estate except for the chickens, flocks of predatory paroquets that came to raid the Sikh's admirably irrigated little kitchen garden and some snipe that Simpson shot most days before breakfast, had nothing to do.

Simpson reflected that he could not even amuse himself, even if he had wanted to, with the railway train. Gadgets were, he thought, rather like a special kind of joke; either they amused you very much or they left you wholly and stunningly cold.

He decided to learn Malay.

With his phrase book on the table between them, he faced the Sikh for several hours a day. Youthful and dogged, he would repeat from the phrase book, as best he could, one of those sentences of dialogue intended for the guidance of passing travellers: "Have you any idea where I can find a post-office? What time is it? Could I have the bill for my room?"

Some of these phrases were not useful; to others he got an answer, reasonably mundane and practical, from the Sikh. He then made the Sikh repeat it several times and then, after repeating it himself, looked it up, entire if possible, but mostly word by word, in the book.

In this way, question by question, answer by answer, simply by having nothing to do from six in the morning until darkness fell with a scarcely perceptible breath of coolness from the river, he learned Malay.

The following Thursday he heard the toot of the *Roselay*'s whistle coming up the river and he went down to talk with Captain Custance on the quay.

Captain Custance, more voluble than ever, came down to the landing-stage with several letters: three for Simpson himself, the others for Malan.

"Forgot the chlorodyne," Captain Custance said. "How's your guts? All right? I'll bring it up next time—you'll need it if your guts go wrong. There's nothing better if your guts go wrong. How's

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your Malay? Coming on? Getting it going?" He rattled off several exploratory phrases, keen and garrulous with delight that Simpson could reply. "Brushing up your billiards? They tell me there's a damn nice table there. I got half a mind to push her a bit harder downstream next Sunday and stop for an hour and have a drink and play you for a bob."

"The table's covered with a railway."

"Covered? Covered with what?"

As Simpson explained Captain Custance manipulated stringy clots of spittle between rubbery and astonished jaws and finally ejected a long swift arrow to the quay.

"I got to see that," he said. "By heavens, that's something I got to see."

"Stay to lunch," Simpson said. "I'll get the drinks as cold as I can and George can do a curry."

Captain Custance was so astonished, in a groping and simple kind of way, that he did not even ask who George could be.

Of Simpson's letters two were from Ford and Harrison. Friendly as ever, hearty and with a certain charm, they recalled for him evenings in Singapore and hoped he would soon return. The other was from the Company. It too was friendly, in a formal way, and requested him "to explore, as soon as is convenient to your good self, the question of local labour. Preliminary inquiries only at this stage, as to numbers available, are required, and no question of remuneration should be discussed, or suggested, at the present stage. Our Mr. Malan will deal with such problems as may arise in that field immediately on his return."

He rode off next day, with the Sikh, along roads of bludgeoning and dusty heat to the nearest village, four miles away.

At the village—he judged it to have, perhaps, three hundred people, housed variously in small palm huts, under bamboo stilts supporting sheets of corrugated iron and in square compounds of palm frond—the question of assessing local labour was not difficult. There was no local labour to assess.

But a curious thing happened. He was pushing the bicycle along an open track dividing two rows of palm huts that had something of the look of a collection of crouching ant-hills when a figure ran down from one of them to meet him, laughing and holding out her arms.

She was one of the little Chinese women of whom Captain Custance had spoken—pretty as a bantam, delicate-eyed, slender arms branching beautifully from a simple frock of sleeveless shantung.

As she came running down first one and then the other of her heel-less straw slippers fell off. In her excited joy she did not notice them and they lay behind her in the dust, looking like two tongues of scarlet, the silk of their bright linings gleaming as if polished by the rubbing of her feet. Without them she ran springingly, the side slit of her skirt dividing as far as her thigh, and from twenty or thirty feet away he saw her mouth open in a flutter of laughter, tumbling and delighted as she called something to him over and over again.

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"*O! Kekasih,*" it sounded like, "*O! Kekasih,*" the word so much part of her laughter that he could not relate it to anything the Sikh had taught. "*Kekasih*—"

And then, ten feet away from him, she stopped. He saw her look from the bicycle to his face, and then from himself back to the bicycle. She put both hands to her face, stopping her mouth, and then let the fingers run upwards into her black hair like rigid ivory curls. She gave a little blubber of frightened astonishment and then looked from his face to the bicycle, shocked almost to despair, for the last time.

A moment later she turned and began to run. She darted back towards the house, as if remembering the slippers. A piercing yell came at the same moment from one of the huts, and she doubled round, floundering and swift, exactly like a tiny scuttling hen, dipping and darting between hedges of creeper and vine.

From the hut a young Tamil, in a pair of greasy shorts tied up with rope, came running in long furious strides, yelling hoarsely, skidding in the dust as he seized on the fallen slippers, his voice squeezed to a long thin scream as he hurled them after her.

Still yelling, he came straight on for Simpson, who caught the incredible gleam of a knife whipped from the waist-band of the shorts.

And then the Tamil, exactly like the girl, stopped. He too seemed stunned by the relation of Simpson and the bicycle. He stood panting, spitting his surprise sideways into the dust, moving the knife in his fingers with short venomous twists at body height, at about the level of the gleaming handles of the bicycle, before he suddenly turned and walked back to the hut.

Halfway up the slope he stopped and brandished the knife for the last time, shouting sentences Simpson had no hope of understanding, and then disappeared.

"What was he saying?" Simpson said.

The Sikh, already turning back, one foot on the pedal of his bicycle, shrugged his shoulders.

"Take no notice. Bad people—"

"What was it?"

"Oh! he says"—he gave his curious half-negative tilt of the head—"he says the knife is for Malan. But take no notice—bad people."

They rode back together out of the village and Simpson was still thinking of the dipping and darting little woman, so delicate and startled and so like Captain Custance's description, when suddenly he saw her again.

She was lying just off the roadside, flat on her face, in the shelter of a strip of young bamboo, waiting and watching for him to go past. Again she was like a scared and skulking little fowl, staring incredibly at himself and the bicycle. Her only movement was to lift one arm to her face, framing it in the crook of the elbow, and the last he saw of her was a sudden lowering of the arm, hiding all the face except one bright dark eye that followed him with shocked curiosity as he rode away.

That evening after supper—pineapples, drenched in sticky

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sweetened tinned milk and sprayed with rather stale limp nuts, had for the tenth successive night formed part of it—Simpson sat on the verandah, thinking of Malan.

A figure built up from prejudice, from the light and shadow of preconceptions, from the behaviour of the Chinese girl and the voice of the shouting Tamil, from the presence everywhere of gadgets and the toy railway, lay already complete in his mind. The man, he was quite certain, was one of those smug inflated creatures of self-creation who are quite unpuncturable, who inflate and re-inflate and soar in bloated pride, endlessly, for ever.

A prig: the great Malan: the very basis of it all was in the photograph. And while thinking he remembered the words called to him in Malay, by the Chinese girl—*O! Kekasih, Kekasih*—and he looked them up. "O darling! O loved one!" his phrase book said.

LATER that night, in bed, he took the photograph out again, staring at it for some minutes before he slept. There the fellow was: more colossally smug, if that were possible, even than when he had first looked at the photograph more than a week before. Even the moustache seemed, if possible, to curl a little more.

And he said, almost aloud, looking back at the girl with the pretty black hair, the fixed and fragile stare and the reputedly delicate nature: "Well: I think you were well out of it. Whatever it was and whoever you are, you were well out of it—I think so."

On Sunday Captain Custance came.

Most of the bottle of gin he brought with him was drunk, in generous portions, with lime, in the hour before lunch. Glass in hand, Captain Custance swayed about in front of the model train, bending sometimes to feel the legs of the billiard table underneath it as if they had been the legs of a favourite horse he had not seen for some time. "Knock-out," he kept saying. "Bloody knock-out."

He winked occasionally at Simpson. At lunch, consisting of roast snipe followed by the inescapable pineapple, which Captain Custance refused, he delivered garrulous sermons with the aid of his knife and fork, banging their handles on the table.

"Wanted to tear my engine room to pieces once," he said. "Efficiency, more efficiency—reckoned he could re-plan it to give me about a hundred per cent more power. Dammit, the old tub was built in Barrow in '97—you might as well try to make the Pyramids into blocks of bloody flats. Had any trouble with the locals yet?"

"No."

"Damn lucky. That's all. Damn lucky."

"Shall we have coffee on the verandah?" Simpson said.

"Ought to be pushing off. Anyway I got to have one more look at that railway. That's a damnation corker. Give me a drop more gin."

Gin in hand, Captain Custance stared again at the billiard table and its load of flawless track and rolling stock. "Pity," he kept saying. "Pity. We could have played a hundred up for a bob. Damn pity."

He became lost, in spite of himself, in admiration of Malan's

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remarkable handiwork, saying, loose-lipped, a little drunk: "It's a damn marvel, y'know. Come to think of it. No flies on it. You got to give him his due. Eh? Don't you think so?" And then: "Seen any Chinese women yet?"

"No."

"Damned attractive, some of 'em. Sweet as little bantams." He rolled a mouthful of gin round the back of his teeth. Water moistened his reddened happy eyes. "You ought to pick yourself one. While away the long evenings."

"I always understood it was the thing to do."

"Stick to you like burrs off a thistle," Captain Custance said. "Never leave you—ask the great Malan. You ask him. See what he says—" It was typical of Captain Custance, in this moment of enigmatic repetition, to slip on the polished floor of the billiard room, feet skidding on a panther rug, and fall down.

By the time he was on his feet again, unsteady but unhurt, the whole question of the faithfulness of Chinese women, with reference particularly to Malan, seemed to have slipped his mind. He hobbled, belching and swearing, down to the landing-stage. Then, gin-clogged eyes shining in the sun, he shook hands several times, calling Simpson "my boy."

"Remember what I said, my boy. You know?"

In a final moment of excessive affection, still looking round, he fell up the gangway, from the top of which he bawled: "I'll give you fair warning when I bring him up. See what I mean? Six toots on the Joanna—just to give you time."

A fortnight later, unexpectedly, without a letter of warning from the Company and with no signal except Captain Custance's six sudden promised toots on the funnel whistle, given downstream about a mile away, Malan and his wife arrived.

THE signal from Captain Custance gave Simpson just time to get down to the landing-stage. The *Roselay* was bouncing for the second time against the string of motor tyres as he passed the derelict offices where the Sikh kept chickens.

A few fowls, small, brilliant-feathered, reminding him not unnaturally of Captain Custance's belief in the delicate bantam-like beauty of Chinese women but also of the fact that he had intended to clear out the chickens before Malan arrived, were scratching daintily about the dust. They rose and scattered in clouds of rosy powder as Captain Custance blew a toot of welcome on the whistle, at the same time waving his hand from his cage on the upper deck.

And then, as the *Roselay* bumped to rest, Simpson looked up. It was a moment he never forgot. Malan, stockier than he had anticipated, dressed in khaki bush-shirt and shorts, with a soft felt hat, was standing side by side with his wife, who wore a simple frock of white silk, low cut at the neck, with unelaborate crimson facings. She stood there in an attitude of such fascinated precision, too familiar to be true, that for a moment or two Simpson forgot to reply to Malan's very friendly waving hand.

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For then he could not believe, for some moments longer, that the woman on the ship was the girl in the photograph : the girl in the tennis frock, with the pretty dark hair, the engaging penetrating eyes and the delicate nature.

" Hullo, there." Malan, cordially, with easy friendliness, came down the gangway and stood on the quay and shook hands : " Malan —no need to tell you, I'll bet, either."

" I'm Simpson." He was conscious of a ridiculous sensation of deference. Malan was twenty years older than himself, and he wanted suddenly, for some idiotically compelling reason, to call him sir.

" Simpson : this is my wife. We've both been looking forward to meeting you."

" How do you do, Mrs. Malan."

He shook hands ; she held him for a moment with the precise dark stare he knew so well from the photograph. Her hands were uncommonly small : almost out of proportion to the rest of her body, which filled the white dress to perfection, generous but compact and still young.

" Oh, not Mrs. Malan ! Please, no ' Mrs.'," she said. " Eh ? Not ' Mrs.' "

" Good Heavens, man, no."

" I'm Vera. What are you ? "

She smiled ; she looked up at him and her eyes, intense and pretty, quivered in the sun. All of her had the profoundly disturbing familiarity he had gleaned from the photograph.

" Bill," he said.

" Lovely. At least we can start right. Even if we end by hating the sight of each other."

Malan had walked over to the edge of the landing-stage to give a final message, or perhaps simply to say good-bye, to Captain Custance.

" We talked so much about you," she said. " Those boys at Singapore—Ford and Harrison—they talked about you all the time."

She held him with her precise dark stare. The *Roselay* began to move from the quay. He heard Captain Custance shout something and was glad of the chance to turn away from Mrs. Malan and wave his hand.

" Well, have you been bored, waiting for us ? " she said.

" No," he said. " That's the funny thing about it here—" he still could not look at her and, out of sheer uneasiness, was watching Malan walking up from the quay—" time seems to go terribly quickly. It's a different sort of time—it sort of dissolves away and you start forgetting—"

He did not know quite what he was saying ; his thoughts were out of all relation to his words. He had not the slightest idea what he meant by forgetting. " Well, as long as it always goes like that," she said.

She started to walk up the road. He half-waited for Malan, who came up and put a hand on his shoulder : a friendly, perhaps too friendly hand, with an eager muscular squeeze.

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"Well, old boy, everything all right? How does it go?"

"Very well—I'm afraid I haven't done much except learn the lingo. I'm sorry about the hens in the offices. I meant to have got them out."

"Don't give it a thought. Plenty of pineapples?"

His sharp high laugh—like the squeeze of the hand uncomfortable, over-eager—made Mrs. Malan turn round and wait for them.

"Now what have you two got to laugh about already?"

"Oh! private joke. Eh, Bill?"

"Well—"

"Oh now, come on! So early in the day—"

"Oh, it's nothing," Malan said. "You'll find out."

It was all rather forced, Simpson thought, a little brittle, not happy, besides being tedious. Mrs. Malan's mouth was tight, unrelaxed in spite of its smile, in the sun, and he suddenly said: "Look, I'll rush on and warn the Sikh about the bags and lunch. You'll want a drink too—"

He strode out up the road. Sweat prickled, like a nettle sting, all over his body, and Malan called:

"We'd specially like some pineapples. Don't forget the pineapples," and gave once again the high over-strung laugh that was something like a crow.

At lunch Malan was like a man laying a long elaborate firing fuse. Carefully through the mulligatawny and its quartered limes, through the chicken and spice-hot rice, went the prepared trail that would blow, at last, the explosive joke of the pineapple into Mrs. Malan's face.

"Pineapples!" Mrs. Malan said. The joke had not misfired. "It's years since I really tasted one—oh, marvellous!"

"Marvellous," Malan said. "Jolly thoughtful of me to remember—"

"Delicious," Mrs. Malan said. "Absolutely delicious. It couldn't be better."

"Fresh supplies every day," Malan said and turned to Simpson a face overjoyed, but impassive, at the success of yet another cunning device; but whether Mrs. Malan too was aware of it, or not aware of it, or simply too used to it to care, he did not know.

"What about this labour situation?" Malan said.

Lunch was over and the three of them were sitting, with coffee, on the verandah. Sometimes across the clearing, once a garden but now a pink arena of dust where fowls scratched, large butterflies of narcissus cream and yellow danced with great trembling strokes to disappear into the bamboo fringe beyond. Entranced, Mrs. Malan gave an occasional cry of gasping, sighing delight at such loveliness and at last, unable to bear the sight of a floating triangle of more lovely, more unreal brilliance than the rest, she got up and walked after it, stalking it, stealthily, like a child in the sun.

Malan was glad of the opportunity to slip over and sit in the chair next to Simpson.

"We must get this labour organized. What were you able to do? Any luck at all?"

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"No," Simpson said. "No work. That's what they say."

"I see," Malan said, "I'd better go down there. At once. This afternoon."

Out in the compound Mrs. Malan had kicked off her shoes and was running with naked feet after butterflies.

"Put your shoes on!" Malan called. "You want to get foot worm or some other damn thing?"

Out in the dust, small, intense-eyed and hurt, she was caught in pained surprise by the sharp crow of Malan's voice.

"Put them on!"

"Are you speaking to me?" she said.

"Put your shoes on and do as you're told and don't argue. Never run about without your shoes in this country."

"All the natives do—"

"You're not a native. Put them on."

An air of intense pain, not defiant but transfixed so that it gave her eyes exactly the appearance, very close together, of the double holes of a gun-barrel, held her there absolutely motionless for perhaps another fifteen or twenty seconds, and then Malan said: "You know what you promised."

"Yes," she said.

She put on her shoes.

Malan, taking a sip of coffee and leaning over again to Simpson, said nothing beyond a casual, almost curt remark in explanation: "She's rather delicate. She has to take care," and then: "Yes, I think I'd better go down there. By the way I've got letters for you—"

"I'll come down too," Simpson said.

"No. I'll go alone. It's better. It's probably going to be frightfully tricky and it would be simpler if I nipped down myself on the bike."

"By the way, I've been using your bicycle. The Sikh said—"

"Oh! you have, have you?"

That afternoon Malan was gone for three hours. Simpson spent most of the afternoon rearranging his things. He had slept for three weeks in the large bedroom, now to be occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Malan, but without fans to work and cool the air he had found it very hot indoors and now he decided to sleep on the verandah, in a small camp bed.

"Are you really going to sleep there? Aren't you worried about things creeping about?"

All afternoon Mrs. Malan kept up a flow of pleasant, idly personal conversation.

"I should be worried stiff, sleeping out there. Is it always as hot as this?"

"Always. You ought to rest in the afternoons," he said. "You'll find it pays."

"Oh! I'm too excited to rest. The first day and all that, you know—how long are you going to be here?"

"I don't quite know. Perhaps another month," he said: "The idea was to send me to a plantation farther north—"

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" Spencer said if you were any good he'd like to keep you here. That's if you wanted to—"

Spencer—it took him some seconds to grasp that she was using his Christian name. Spencer Malan : it was like the name of an actor, a priest, an explorer or something. It had importance. Yes : it suited him rather well. He could not make up his mind whether Malan was the prig he had thought he was. He had been very friendly and nice—over-friendly if anything—but underneath it all he seemed worried, slightly preoccupied.

It might have been the labour problem, he thought. After all it was his responsibility.

Mrs. Malan too had been unpacking her things. At four o'clock the Sikh brought tea on to the verandah and Simpson, tapping on the open door of her bedroom and entering in answer to her voice, found her surrounded by the gay curtaining of many dresses on coat-hangers, night-gowns lying on the bed, silk stockings and feathery, flimsy lingerie spilling over chairs. That array of soft pretty clothing seemed to heighten all her delicacy. At the door, seeing them, he hesitated a moment but she said, " Oh ! Come in, come in. Don't mind all this."

She was holding in her hands a chiffon night-gown, soft yellowish-cream, rather the colour of the butterfly she had chased across the compound, and looking as if made, almost, of the same flimsy transparent stuff.

He could not help looking at it. She saw him looking and smiled and held it across her body. " Isn't it nice ? " she said. " Isn't it lovely ? " and smoothed it down, across the front of her breasts, with her hand, smiling again.

His heart started racing wildly and she said :

" I've got the loveliest things. I determined I would have. I determined I wouldn't come out here and be sloppy and look like a frump just because there weren't other women here." She laid the night-dress on the bed and the revelation of her clothed body underneath it—she had somehow given the impression that it was all she had on—gave him a curious shock. " What about you ? " she said. " Have you got a girl ? "

" No," he said. " By the way there's tea on the verandah now—"

" I bet you have," she said. " Somewhere."

" No," he said. " No."

" You've got a photograph of her too. Show me the photograph."

" No, really," he said. Inside himself a small quivering hammer made staccato stabbings just under his heart. " No honestly—it's true—"

" You'll show me it later," she said. " Men always do."

And out on the verandah, pouring tea, slipping into each cup a quarter of lime like a little brilliant emerald-yellow boat, carefully and delicately, she said :

" Some tea ? How many sugars ? It's awfully hot, isn't it ? You've gone quite pale."

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THAT evening, at supper, Malan talked mostly about the electricity. He hoped to fit a silencer to it, so that the noise would not be too bad. In any case it did not need to run for many hours at a time. The demands on it were very limited : just the lighting, the fans, the refrigerator and—

" Of course the train," he said.

Simpson thought Mrs. Malan, staring cross-wise, in a dreamy oblique sort of way, between himself and Malan, did not seem in any way interested in the train.

" We'll open the track next Sunday," Malan said. " Break a bottle on it or something. And mind, no peeping till then—"

" I wouldn't dream of peeping," she said, her voice innocent and thin and cool.

" Make it a party when Captain Custance comes," Simpson said. The words came to him without thinking. There was the strangest sort of tension in the air between Malan and his wife that he could not explain. " Custance," he said with sudden eagerness, " is dying to see it working—"

" You showed it to Custance ? " Malan said—he looked affronted rather than annoyed—" that nosey old rascal—"

Simpson, embarrassed, could think of nothing to say. Mrs. Malan looked tense. Malan broke into a harsh splintering crackle the remains of a water-biscuit and the situation was saved a moment later by the entry of the Sikh, proudly bringing the inevitable dishes of pineapple and whipped milk and pistachio as if they were offerings either to or from the gods, and Mrs. Malan finished the tension with a final cry :

" Pineapple ! That's just what I want to quench my thirst."

Malan, in that moment, did a curious thing, followed a second later by another. He winked swiftly at Simpson, all trace of resentment or affront or annoyance gone, and then got up from the table, replacing his chair.

" What's the matter ? Don't you want your pineapple ? Where are you going ? "

" I'm worried about this labour thing," Malan said. " I'm going over to see Bruno."

" Bruno ? Who's Bruno ? "

" He used to be one of my boys. He's got a lot of influence in the village—his brother-in-law's a trader. I tried to get him this afternoon but he was fishing up-river. He'll probably have a few fish I can bring back—"

" Don't be long."

As he came past her she held his hand, lifting her face, and he stooped to kiss her.

" Have coffee with Bill on the verandah. It's cooler out there. Bill will look after you."

" Don't stay long," she said and gave him, as he went out of the door, a wonderfully intent and pressing smile that reacted on Simpson with a start of pain.

Later, as they sat on the verandah, in darkness broken only by the

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reflection through the windows of the lamp burning in the dining-room, she sat in a cane chair some distance away from him, the table between them, and for some time there was hardly a sound from her but the creak of the chair and the occasional clink of her cup and coffee spoon. He was glad, for a time, that she had nothing to say.

The night was full of a heavy plush-like beauty, with uncommonly brilliant and enormous stars. Everywhere there was a depth of darkness and scintillation, of purple and blackness, with flashes of fire and emerald, and a silence of impenetrable wonder that was almost grandeur as it folded profoundly away.

He turned his head slightly and looked at her in the chair. He could see her hands, fine and delicate and small, on the edges of the chair, and her arms golden-white, not yet tanned by the sun, naked to the shoulder. Her breasts were mature and full, thrown out a little by the attitude of her body in the chair, her head leaning backwards, the outer edges of her black hair ignited to a flush of brightness from the glow of the lamp behind her.

At last she turned her head very slightly towards him and said: "I thought you'd gone to sleep, you're so quiet. There was something I wanted to ask you."

"Yes," he said.

"Perhaps it sounds silly—"

He waited, staring at the stars.

"Is there something funny about pineapples?" she said. "Is it a joke with you?"

"No."

"It's a joke, isn't it?"

"Not exactly."

"Why is it a joke? Is it from something I said?"

He was surprised by a start of inner rage against Malan. It was so violent, somewhere down at the bottom of his throat, that it constricted his voice as he began to try to explain away the monstrously stupid business of the pineapples.

It was only that there were so many, he explained. They were a plague, just an indestructible weed. You couldn't get rid of them. The Sikh served them twice or three times a day and at first you thought they were wonderful but after a time they were like poison and you wanted to scream. That was all it was.

"Thank you," she said quietly. And then: "There was something else I wanted to ask you."

"Yes," he said.

"Will you tell me if you see I am making a fool of myself again? Will you tell me that?"

"I'm sure there won't be any need."

"I don't want to make a fool of myself," she said. "Will you tell me?"

"Yes," he said.

"You're very sweet," she said. "I rely on you."

After that she did not speak again until, perhaps twenty minutes later, she said, "I'm getting sleepy. I think I must go in," and got

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up from her chair. He got up too but she said, " Don't get up. Please," but it was too late and he found himself standing a few inches away from her, his gaze held for a second or two by the glowing magnetic stare of the small black eyes and then, suddenly lowering, by the crossward fold of her dress over her breasts. " Good-night," she said.

He walked as far as the jetty, standing there for some time listening to the river advancing seaward in wide breaking flood-swirls that struck at banks and tree-roots in a fishbone series of little waves. He smoked a final cigarette and looked at the stars and thought of Mrs. Malan. He could not tell what lay behind that appeal about making a fool of herself and that rather desperate remark of hers : " I rely on you." All the inside of himself melted in a strange fluidity of engrossed and tender wonder as he thought of her and tried, youthful and fascinated, to work it out.

When he got back to his bungalow the Sikh was still up, waiting to lock the doors. " Malan not in ? " Simpson said and George, in a sharp, almost defiant flick, shook his head.

As he walked through the sitting-room to go to bed on the verandah he stopped and, remembering Malan's odd resentment at Captain Custance's nosiness, tried the handle of the billiard room, where the train was.

It was locked. Afterwards he lay awake for a long time on his small camp-bed, under the mosquito net, thinking of that too. In the Malans' bedroom the lamp continued to burn, keeping him awake even when he turned at last and tried to sleep, and Malan did not come in.

IN two days, as Malan had promised, the electricity began to work. Light, fans, refrigerator : there was an infinity of useful switches everywhere. By day, for two or three hours, the generator added to the discomfort of stunning midday heat a coughing brain-beating thud.

To the multitude of household gadgets Malan added an astounding, admirable efficiency in bigger things. Soon the offices were cleared of chickens ; and an overhead cable, insulated on high poles of bamboo, took power for fans and light down from the bungalow, and the estate plan found its place on the wall over Malan's big teak desk. " I've got the idea for inter-comm. speakers all worked out too," Malan said, " so that if we want each other or a boy or anything we don't have to go running and yelling round. You've got to save the sweat here."

Simpson found himself full of reluctant admiration ; the curious moment of hatred did not obtrude again.

The question of labour was something that Simpson finally thought it tactful to leave alone. Two or three Tamils appeared and assisted in the laying of cables from the bungalow to the offices, but when he inquired of Malan how soon the coolies would be coming in anything like useful numbers Malan gave one of the sudden curt replies that had crushed the inquisitiveness of Captain Custance :

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" I'll deal with the labour. That's my pigeon. Never worry your head in this climate about things that are supposed to worry other people. That's the quickest way to belly-trouble."

" I just thought—"

" Well, don't think. Thinking is bad in this climate."

" I know the thing is a headache," Simpson said. " The way you're out there nearly every night trying to get it straightened out—"

" I'll straighten it," Malan said. " I've straightened it before. Do your work. Never mind where I go at night or for that matter at any other time. That's my affair."

Work began every morning at half-past five, with breakfast at eight and lunch at twelve, with a sleep of two hours afterwards. Malan was unexpectedly and irritatingly strict about hours. " That's another thing in this climate. Work early and sleep enough. Three hours before breakfast are worth ten afterwards. And a sleep after lunch is worth anything at night." There was nothing, it seemed, that Malan did not know; nothing about which he could not lay down the incontrovertible law. " I know. I've been here before." And Simpson began to see, now, the protruding edges of the great Malan.

One morning, after breakfast, he felt a thickness about his eyes; the whites of them were yellow and liverish and there was a dull beating, made worse by the Sikh's breakfast of fried eggs, on the bone of the forehead. He stayed behind for a time after breakfast, bathing his head with lumps of ice in the bath-house, and when he reached the offices Malan was already working.

" Late," Malan said.

" I felt a bit seedy."

Malan caught him by the jaw in a movement that ejected his tongue a second before he had said the word.

" I told you you'd get belly-trouble," he said. " This your first touch of gyppy tummy ? "

" Yes."

" Go back and tell Vera to give you chlorodyne and one of the tablets in the yellow bottles—she'll know. You'll be all right after a bit—it's nothing, you'll be all right."

Back at the bungalow Mrs. Malan was sitting on the verandah, writing letters.

" I thought you looked off-colour at breakfast," she said, and he was pleased, comforted in his grey liverish state, to think that she had noticed it.

She mixed the chlorodyne for him in a tumbler and stood watching him with intent dark eyes as he drank the sweetish soothing milk of it.

" You ought to take a day off," she said. " You look all in."

He shook his head; something bumped under his skull like a leaden ball.

" How's your pulse ? " she said. " Come here—let me feel it." In expert fingers she quietly held his hand. " I used to be a nurse. During the war. I was nursing Spencer when—" She broke off.

He had an idea, suddenly, that she was not counting his pulse.

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The fingers were there, resting on his throbbing blood; but the mind was not there. For some reason he knew she was distracted, far away.

"It's all right," she said. "I'll take your temperature at lunch. The thermometer's packed away somewhere."

"It's nothing—I'll work it off," he said.

As he reached the end of the verandah she called to him:

"By the way, have you a key to the billiard room?"

"Yes." It was part of Malan's efficiency that each of them should have, except for purely personal things, a key for everything.

"Would you lend it me?"

"Yes, of course," he said.

She smiled and said, "Thank you. I'll give it back tonight."

In the evening he felt better. After supper Malan stayed for a short time on the verandah to take coffee and then, as on so many other nights, excused himself and walked down the road. She lay quiet in her chair; she might have been listening to his footsteps retreating down the pink-dust road between the wilderness of rampant pineapples. She seemed to judge the quietness carefully for five minutes longer and then her arm came out from the chair.

"The key," she said.

"Thank you." He took his wallet from the breast pocket of his bush-shirt. An aunt, efficient in her kindly way, had given him a new wallet with a neat compartment for keys: better than wearing out the linings of his trousers pocket, she said.

He opened the wallet to put in the key and suddenly, before he could prevent it, she swung both hands across and clutched it.

"Let me see," she said. "The photo of the girl's in it. I know it is—let me see."

"Oh! no, please—"

"Come on," she said. "Own up—let me see."

She twisted her body, sitting on the edge of his chair, half-wrenching the wallet from him. The chair rocked dangerously, tipping over at an angle with the weight of two bodies. He put out a hand to check it, touching the wooden floor-slats, and in that moment she slipped and fell against him. He felt the smooth shape of her leg fleshily touching his own, the weight of her breast, unsteadied by her hands, falling across his arm. He let go the wallet, tipping the chair back into balance so that with the motion of it she was rocked back, laughing, against him.

It was a laugh of triumph that teased him too: because now she had the wallet and he did not stop her. He could feel the shape of her body outlined against his knee. There was a little light from the lamp in the dining-room and she turned her back to him, opening the wallet, so that she could look at it. Her hair, fired at the back by light, was scalloped into long and brilliant edges of dense black curls, and he was fired too by the frenzy of watching it, so close that he could touch it with his mouth. He knew that in a moment he would touch it with his mouth and then draw her back, by the throat; he knew that she could only have come to him like that because she wanted to

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come, soft and deliberate and laughing and excited, and then he heard her gasp, softly :

" Good heavens : how did you come by this ? "

A day or two before he had cut the picture in half, throwing Malan away.

" I found it here."

" But it's ancient—years—ghastly—"

He held her gently by the throat, drawing her back until her face was level with his own. She did not say a word. A twist of her body brought her half round to him, so that she lay across him, turning her face. Her mouth in another moment was full against his and fire, in a series of running, beating waves, ran wildly up through him as she kissed him, almost hurting him with the strength of it.

" Fancy me," she said, " me—how was it me ? "

" Who else ? " he said.

" Oh ! God," she said and he saw, as in the photograph, just so minutely and with just such precision, but now so profoundly dark that he could hardly bear to look at them, the deep eyes staring.

In another moment, in a loud whisper—loud enough, he thought, for Malan to hear if he were coming up the road, she called him darling, and instinctively he turned to look in the direction Malan would come.

" Let's walk to the river," he said, " it's better there. In case—"

" No," she said ; she spoke in the quietest compelling sort of breath, almost a sigh, her lips just brushing his face. " No, here. Here will do. It's better here—"

He kissed her again, searching the front of her body excitedly with his hands, feeling its full tautness, the lovely nest-like hollow, without a word of protest from her.

" You're not afraid of anything, are you ? " she said.

" No, not afraid," he said. He felt her trembling with excitement and joy. " Not afraid."

AFTER that, every evening, she would wait for him on the verandah, swinging quietly in her chair until Malan had gone. Every evening, she wore a different dress. The two meals of the day at which the three of them were together, the evening one especially, were more and more of a pain. Sometimes he could not bear to look at her. Yet whenever he did look she was always looking in return : with that delicate undisturbed precision of hers, quiet and magnetic and powerful, holding him completely. It never failed.

The curious thing was that he could not help feeling it was directed just as much at Malan. At first that part of it troubled him. Then he got over it ; he saw that of course, naturally, there had to be a smile for Malan too. Deception as well as love had to have its smile. He even grew used to her lifting her face to Malan, to take his kiss ; he could even ignore, almost, the fondness of the departing word :

" Don't be long, dear. Please."

On the question of the labour force Simpson now waited his cue from Malan. It appeared one evening that Malan was worried by

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communists: "That's half the trouble here. They're infiltrating everywhere. They're the trouble makers. They don't want you to have labour—prevent it by every damn means in their power."

"You think there'll be trouble?" Simpson said. "I mean—"

"Not bandits?" she said.

"Good Lord no. It's a local thing. They're like children—they need soothing gently."

"Anyway Bill's an awfully good shot, aren't you, Bill? Bill can take care of me."

"I know. I want him to."

"In fact I think he takes care of me better than you do."

"Good," Malan said. "That's what I like to hear."

Serenely, with a sort of stiff innocence that chilled him with terror, she put her arm into Simpson's as they walked from the dining-room. "He's a very good escort." Her eyes held Malan with the most engaging frigid charm. "He's very good to me. He spoils me. Aren't you jealous?"

"No."

"Then you ought to be." She quite snapped the words, hard and short, and her face coloured up. "Men don't deserve to have nice wives if they're not jealous of them."

Malan grinned: "I'm not jealous," was all he said. "I'm above jealousy. I wouldn't know how to be."

"Come on, Bill," she said. "There's no arguing with some people."

That evening, on the verandah still flooded with light from the electric lamps in the dining-room, she kissed him even before Malan had gone. It was as if she could not wait to be held by him. She called him darling several times in a voice loud enough for Malan to hear. All the time he could hear Malan himself talking to the Sikh on some question of fixing the silencer to the generator, and a few words of Malay came distinctly to him on the quiet air.

"For God's sake," he whispered.

"Oh, darling," she said loudly. "Who cares?"

"Please," he said.

"I want you so terribly tonight." She spoke in a high frenzied whisper that seemed to carry better than a shout. "I can't bear it—"

A moment later Malan came on to the verandah, carrying his rifle. He said, swiftly:

"Well, I'll be off. The coffee will be along in a moment. I kept the Sikh talking—"

"Why the rifle?" she said.

"I just thought it might be policy to show that we could shoot if necessary, that's all."

"Isn't it a bit provocative?" Simpson said. He felt a new insecure sort of hatred for the too-sure, too-efficient Malan.

"Not more than most things," Malan said, and walked away.

He had hardly walked a hundred yards down the road before she came to sit with him in the chair. She kissed him once but

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she seemed uneasy and suddenly she said : " It's awfully hot tonight. I'll go and put on my house-coat—it's hotter than ever—"

When she came back she had put on a house-coat of flowered crimson and yellow silk. She rang the bell—another of Malan's efficient little gadgets for saving steps and sweat—and then half-lay, half-sat with Simpson in the cane long-chair, waiting for the coffee to come. And when the Sikh came at last on soft feet to bring the tray she did not get up. She lay there all the time, her face close to Simpson's, while the Sikh poured the coffee.

" You ought to be a little careful," he said. The Sikh had gone and in the dining-room all but one of the lights had been put out. It poured its bright shaft on her eager, excited face.

" Why ? " she said: " I'm excited—I can't wait for you. Don't you want me too ? "

" Terribly," he said, and let himself be drawn down, feeling the unencumbered tautness of her body pressing up against him through the silk of the house-coat as the loose flaps of the coat fell away.

Every night he was persuaded that the stars grew more exceptional in brilliance and beauty than the night before. That night they seemed to stab down in great pulses of emerald and ruby and orange, in surges of bright loveliness that matched the burst of his own feeling. He remembered the day he had seen her unpacking her things. Her night-dress had fallen away from her body and he had been shot through by the sharp beauty of it, the bright consciousness of seeing her really for the first time. He had wondered what her body was like ; and in a way it had been inevitable to wonder and at last to find out, and now it was his.

Later that evening, in a deadly, rather far-off voice, she spoke with great bitterness of Malan :

" If it hadn't been for me he wouldn't have been here. I nursed him for six months. He was in one of those bomb-disposal units—no heroics, you know, just more gadgets—and something went off too soon. Eight of them were killed and he was a wreck. If it hadn't been for me fighting for him—fighting all the time—"

" I'll get transferred to another company," he said. " We'll get out of this."

She seemed to take no notice of that ; she seemed wrapped in hatred of Malan.

" The way you can fight for people—go on fighting, too—"

He felt her hatred become his own. All that he had gathered in that quaint period of pre-conception about Malan had, after all, turned out to be true : the gadget king, the oracle, the man who had been and seen and conquered before, the prig of experience, the great Malan. Hatred rushed through him, taking the last of his reticence, his caution, with it.

" If only we could get away," he said. " Somehow we have to get away—we simply have to get away—"

" It's a queer thing, love," she said, as if once again she were not really noticing what he said, " the way it drives you and beats you," and above him, he thought, the stars seemed to explode in frag-

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mentary and more lovely, more brilliant cascades than ever before. He had never seen such stars.

THE Sikh woke him at five o'clock, half an hour earlier than usual, muttering hoarsely.

"Trouble," he said. "There is much trouble. Malan Sahib—"

Out in the compound one of the Tamil boys stood crouched and trembling in the rose-grey sunless daylight.

Together Simpson, the Sikh and the Tamil boy cycled down to the village. There was not much to be done. Malan was lying on the earth floor of a palm-hut with a knife slit deep down the side of the neck and cutting into the shoulder.

Simpson stood outside the hut, sick, trying to collect himself, staring at the sun coming up beyond the deserted roofs of palm and corrugated iron. He started to say something about communists, about the bandits beginning at last.

"No, no, no," the Sikh said. "No, no. Woman. It was for woman here."

Coldly Simpson stood listening to the voice of the Sikh going on. He remembered suddenly Captain Custance's remark about "forty or fifty of them since then." He remembered the Chinese women who were as dainty as little bantams.

"Husband kill," the Sikh said. "He waited—for last time."

Simpson had nothing to say. He was still trembling so much on the way back that he could not ride the bicycle.

At the bungalow he walked up and down outside for some time, smoking a cigarette to calm himself before he went in. He was aware of a queer distorted sort of triumph waiting for him in the moment when he came to tell her. Not the great Malan now: only the dead Malan. Queer that for a second time—and not only queer but a miracle—something had misfired.

When he went into the bedroom to speak to her she was still asleep. He sat on the edge of the bed, looking at her as she began to wake up. She was wearing the white night-dress and sleep had crumpled it. He could see her breasts clear and pink through the bodice of it and suddenly he wanted to sit there on the edge of the bed and not tell her and touch them with his hands. He wanted terribly to take her in the first free moment that they had had together. It would be time to tell her afterwards.

"Darling," she said, "what are you doing here? What time is it? Don't you feel well again? You've gone quite pale."

He began to tell her as simply as he could. He had determined to make up a line about it. It was very simple: the communists, the bandits, had begun at last. She lay watching him with fixed incredulous eyes and it was only when he spoke of communists that she seemed to wake up, to understand what he was trying to say.

She yelled at him: "Don't tell me lies! What happened? Who killed him?—I don't want lies."

"Communists—"

"It was the woman, wasn't it?" she shouted. "The Tamil—

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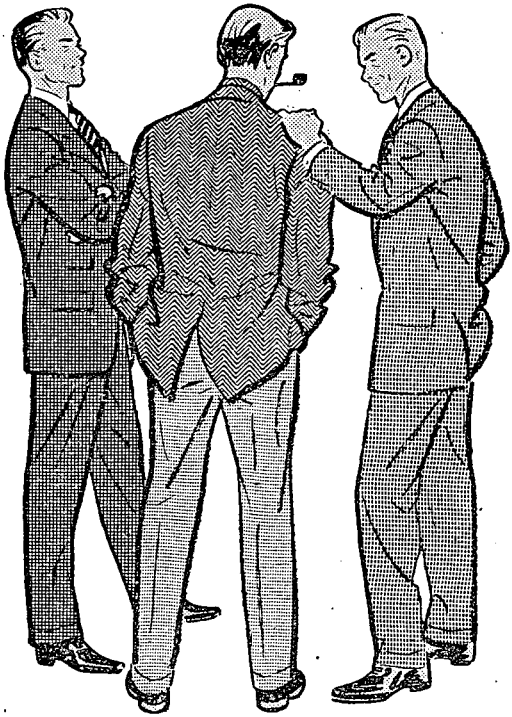

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I know, I know. I knew all the time."

"Look," he said. "We're not certain. It's no use probing into detail. I know how you feel—"

She jumped out of bed and screamed at him starkly: "Don't stand there talking like a raving fool! How do you know how I feel? How can you know?"

Terribly upset, not knowing what to say, he stretched out his hands and tried to hold her. She beat them away and shouted for him not to touch her. Her eyes were tearless and brilliant and hateful and suddenly he had an awful feeling. That all the bitterness she had felt about Malan was being turned, more violently, on him.

"I'm terribly sorry," he said. "Don't upset yourself. It's awful, I know—but it sets us free—"

"Free?" she yelled at him. "Who wants to be free?"

He stood coldly, stunned, in the centre of the room. She was trying to drag on her house-coat. In her haste the zip had locked, so that she could not get it working. He stood helplessly looking on as she struggled and then suddenly she looked up and saw his lost, stupefied face and shouted:

"What do you think I came out here for? I knew all about it. I wanted him back!—I wanted him!—He never wanted me to come!—"

Her patience with the zip ended suddenly. She pitched forward on the bed and lay there beating the clothes with her hands.

"Oh God! Darling, why didn't you listen to me? Why didn't you listen? For God's sake why didn't you listen to me?"

After a time she came out of her room and yelled for the key of the billiard room. He gave it her without speaking. She rushed away and he heard her, in hysteria, smashing up the model railway. That was his only moment of gladness, and he did not stop her.

TWO days later they went down-river, with Captain Custance, in the *Roselay*. She had taken on a rigid distant calmness and spent most of her time in the cabin, lying down.

At noon a Malay seaman rang the bell for lunch and Simpson went down to the stifling stove-hot little saloon. She was not there and he went down the narrow passage to where she was lying in the cabin. He tapped on the door and called her name.

"Come in," she said.

He went in and stood looking at her, saying swiftly: "Lunch is ready. Do you want lunch?" Knowing that she would say no.

"Something to drink?" he said.

"No."

"It's cooler up above. You'll find it cooler than here."

"I'm all right here."

Two impulses flowed quickly through him. He wanted to touch her, with all possible tenderness, as she lay there in the narrow wooden bunk under the open port-hole. He wanted to revive, as gently as possible, the feeling he thought she had shown for him that evening on the verandah, before Malan had died.

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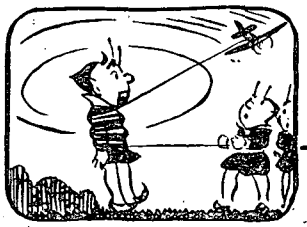

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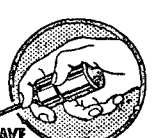

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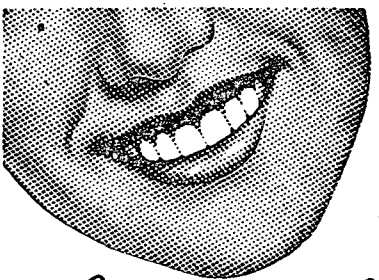

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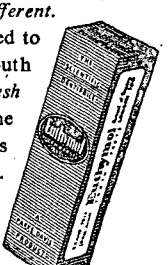

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"Do you remember asking me about making a fool of yourself?" he said.

"That was only because I knew he didn't want me."

"Do you mind if I ask you something now?" he said.

"What?" she said.

"Do you love me?"

"No," she said.

"Do you want me?"

"I think you're very sweet," she said. "It couldn't have happened if you hadn't been so sweet."

"I wanted to know before we landed," he said. "I wanted to put a bit of a face on it, you see."

He waited for a moment longer to see if she would answer. She did not answer. She lay with dark eyes minutely staring, and presently he went on deck, telling the steward as he went through the saloon that he did not want to eat.

He stood for some time with Captain Custance on the bridge. The *Roselay* had moved faster down-river than he had expected and now, through the carmine and emerald elbows of forest, he caught his first glimpse of open sea. The river was running fast, fanning out ahead with the strong silt-brown tide, discolouring the flat cobalt-vivid ocean.

"Hellish tricky here," Captain Custance said. "I knew a master once who laid a ship up through taking her too close here. Looks wider than it is. It was blowing smoke at the time."

In an ensuing moment or two of silence he gathered spittle, chewing on it as if it were hard india-rubber.

"Taking it as well as could be expected?"

"Yes."

"Bloody rum go. Bloody rum. You could have knocked me down with a pint-pot when I saw her coming aboard." He rattled on, chewing his words. "Well, he bought it. That's all I can say. He bought it. He's been buying it for a long time. Everybody up the river knew he'd been buying it for a long time."

Simpson stared ahead too at the open sea: sterile, not thinking, swiftly watching the river dirt discolour in its brown fan the vivid outer cobalt of sunlit water. The heat on the nape of his neck had the stunning, bruising force of mid-afternoon.

"Lucky you happened to be there," Captain Custance said. "Bit of luck or God knows what she would have done without you."

Simpson, intent on the fusion of river and open sea, was not listening. There was a sudden breath of relief, a stir of sea-wind, clean and salty in spite of heat, that bore away in a refreshing moment the stupefying steamy heat of the river.

He looked down, a moment later, to see Mrs. Malan on deck, standing in the bows. His impulses of tenderness started up again, waving away his sterility. He felt he wanted to go down and ask her, for the last time, if she had anything left for him, a trace of something, the smallest thing. He saw the wind from the open sea blow her

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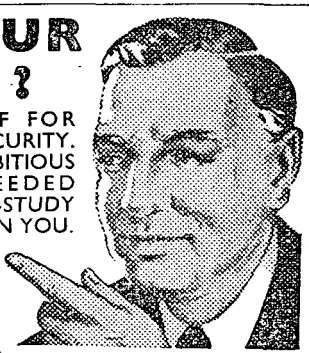

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dress against her legs and a stir of it, with sun, inflame into scalloped gold-black edges the fringe of her hair.

He knew it was only Malan she wanted: the dead Malan, back there, the efficient Spencer, the gadget king, the oracle who had been and done it all before, the prig; the great Malan. She had exterminated everything for that, extinguished it all: distance, time, all the others, the rivals and himself. It was all as obvious as it would ever need to be; he himself was only the pawn, the jealousy factor.

After a few moments he could bear it no longer. He went down to the deck and stood by the rail of the ship, close to her.

"May I talk again?" he said. "Do you mind if I talk?"

"No."

A queer involuntary moment of agony locked his throat, choking him. The *Roselay* seemed to sweep a long way to open sea before he could speak again: "I can't bear it without you."

She did not answer.

He put one hand across her shoulders, smoothing her bare arm. It was rigid and smoothly neutral, but she did not draw it away.

"Don't make me let you go," he said. "I can't bear it."

He touched her throat very softly and she turned her head for the first time, looking at him with the old minute precision, clear and inexorable and dissecting.

"I didn't expect you would let me go."

Joy shot through him and it was as if also, at the same moment, the *Roselay* shot forward, almost out of the river currents, clear at last.

"Oh! I love you," he began to say. "God, I love you." He could feel the softest regular pulsing of the blood in her throat. "I'd do anything—"

"Now you know," she said. "Now you know how it feels."

He did not answer. He could feel her body soft and pulsing and yet distant under his hand. He watched the sea, running now from brown to green and beyond, all pure in scintillation, a beautiful light cobalt that was like the sky. He wanted to think he was clear and free himself and that now, at last, she belonged to him.

And yet it was not what he was now thinking. He could think only of the eyes in the photograph: the small dark eyes, with their timeless, penetrating precision, the beautiful, relentless eyes—and behind them, always, the delicate nature.

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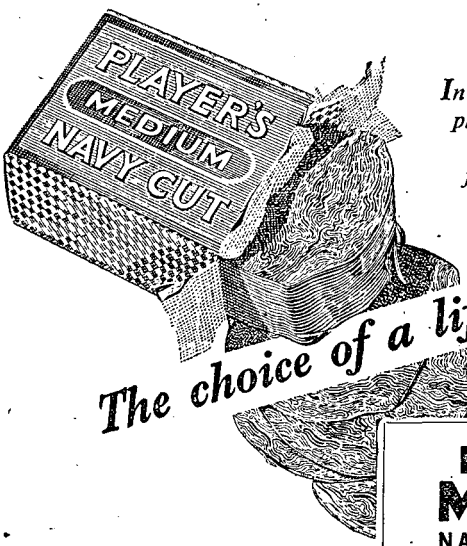

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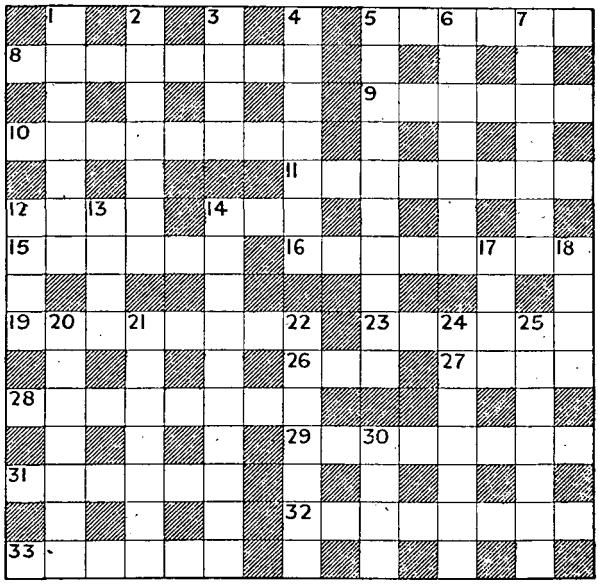
Solution on page 109



CLUES

Across

5 This woolly creature starts off in a high place ! (6).

8 Suitable denizen for an aquarium in a maisonette ? (8).

9 Nominally the current father (6).

10 He's carnivorous, but he evidently finds the female of the species unpalatable (3-5).

11 The secular part of the head ? (8).

12 The good beginning of a lot of money (4).

14 Look ! It's a large district (3).

15 " As this fell sergeant, death, Is strict in his — " (Shakespeare) (6).

16 How one feels at the sight of an extra bus ! (8).

19 Assam finds its U.D.C. in Asia Minor (8).

23 You can make a game of this (6).

26 King Charles was once well up in it (3).

27 You may be misled if you do this between the lines (4).

28 The sort of verse to get your canine teeth into ! (8).

29 He added a change for the fellow with the complimentary ticket (4-4).

31 The company is particoloured but nevertheless derivative (6).

32 The fur-clad naiad has no qualms (8).

33 Even if I were to take second place it still comes to nothing (6).

Down

1 Fifty inside a hat ? Sounds fishy (7).

2 Architecturally it's in the ascendant (7).

3 A stitch in time contains a good tip (4)

4 This privilege is certainly in character (7).

5 The signal for many an uprising (5, 5).

6 He may be a little brave (7).

7 Did this charge originate in an Irish port ? (7).

12 Draw backwards in hospital (4).

13 A queer sort of lily (4).

14 Kit's record covers an equestrian occupation (5-5).

17 It sounds proud— about its superior position, no doubt (4).

18 Either way it's just an act (4).

20 Polo in gay surroundings requires an explanation (7).

21 " Chase —— and doubt and fear and sorrow and pain From mortal or immortal minds " (Milton) (6).

22 Stock remark to those at the end of the queue (4, 3).

24 Perhaps it would be drawing the long bow to suggest that there is a touch of coquetry about this sport ! (7).

25 Papa is covered in ice from head to foot (3-1-3).

30 A half-open vessel (4).

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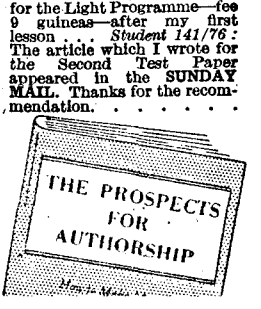

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